South Haven
Tribune

$3

March 29, 2026

LMC rolls out cardiac sonography program

New program aims to fill specialist shortage

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Southwest Michigan health care providers are in need of more cardiac sonographers, so Lake Michigan College is answering the call by adding a specialized area of study under its diagnostic medical sonography program umbrella.

With the introduction of the cardiac sonography program, LMC will train students to become highly skilled allied health professionals who are prepared to perform echocardiograms for a variety of diagnostic and treatment procedures.

According to a news release from LMC, one-third of cardiac sonography positions in Southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana are currently staffed by traveling health care professionals because employers are unable to find qualified candidates for permanent roles. As a result, this program aims to create a local talent pool that employers can depend on.

"Our program advisory committee members, along with leaders of major health systems in the region, enthusiastically support the creation of the cardiac sonography program to address this critical need," Dr. LaToya Mason, LMC dean of health sciences, said in the release. "LMC's proven experience in training highly skilled, career-ready graduates positions us well to do this."

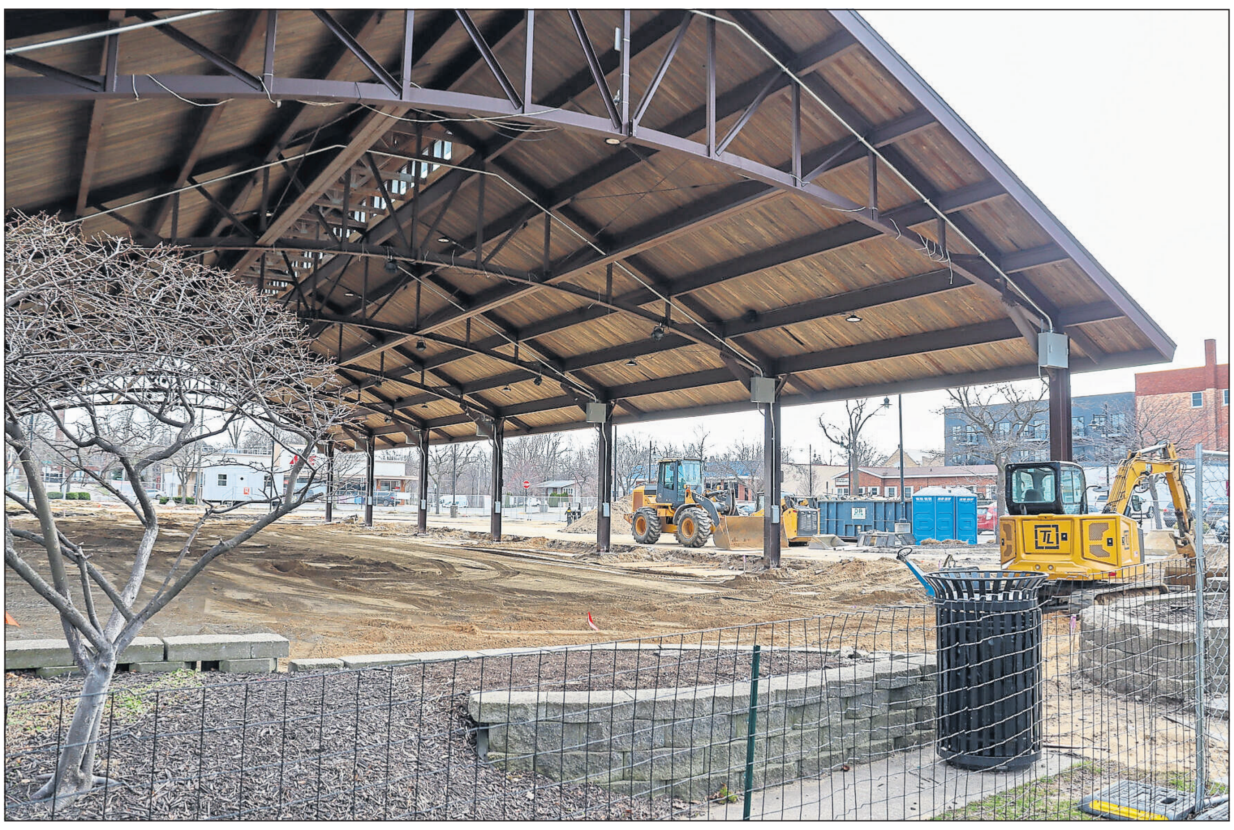
Graduates of the program will earn an associate's degree in applied science, gain eligibility to sit for credentialing board exams upon graduation, and acquire practical skills sought by health care employers.

"We've designed our program with over 800 clinical hours of hands-on training to ensure graduates are not only eligible for the board exams, but also possess the confidence and competence to excel in their roles on day one," Diagnostic Medical Sonography Program Chair and Faculty Member Beth Zak said in the release. "Direct patient interaction prepares them to independently administer specialized tests, making them immediately valuable in the clinical setting."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of diagnostic medical monographers is projected to grow 13 percent from 2024 to 2034. This increase in job growth is driven by an aging population and rising cardiovascular disease rates.

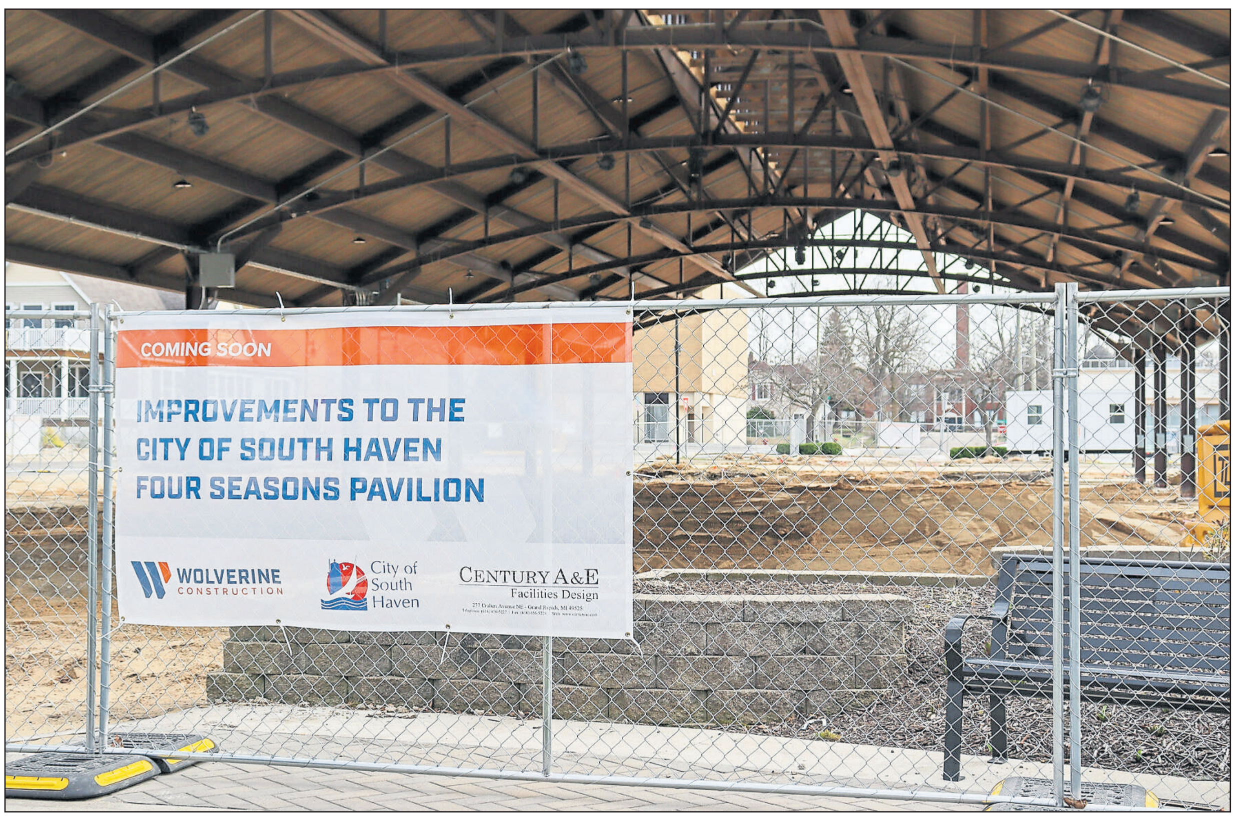
See **PROGRAM**, page A3

PAVILION UPGRADES UNDERWAY



Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Construction has begun on the Huron Street Four Seasons Pavilion, downtown South Haven.


COMING SOON
IMPROVEMENTS TO THE CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN FOUR SEASONS PAVILION
WOLVERINE CONSTRUCTION
City of South Haven
CENTURY A&E Facilities Design

The four seasons pavilion is currently under construction to install a new, underground cooling system for the ice rink.

Photo provided

The Michigan Flywheelers Museum is gearing up to finish the final stretch of the Black River Railroad projects.

SH museum seeks volunteers for train track project

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The Michigan Flywheelers Museum is calling on train enthusiasts, history buffs and community members of all ages to help bring a piece of locomotive history to life.

According to a news release, a meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on April 11 at the museum for anyone interested in volunteering

"As the museum enters the third and final year of its 15-inch gauge railroad project, volunteers are needed to help lay the final stretches of track before its expected completion this fall," the release stated.

The project is designed to be a community-driven effort and no prior construction or railroad experience is required. Volunteers will work alongside museum members to learn the ropes of traditional track building.

Tasks include: grading the track bed to ensure a level path, cutting wooden ties to size, laying and securing steel rail, shoveling and leveling ballast (the stone bed that supports the tracks).

"This railroad is about more than just moving from point A to point B," Museum President Patrick Ingalls

See **VOLUNTEERS**, page A2

Michigan pits small, big schools for funding

It's an unfair fight, leaders say

By RON FRENCH
Bridge Michigan

In a small office in a tiny school district in a county with no traffic signal, Michelle Wesner sits at her desk looking worried. On her computer screen is an application for an $80,000 state grant for a welding career tech program that the superintendent knows her 200 kids at Posen Consolidated Schools desperately need. It's also a grant she frets she won't receive, like some others she's applied for in the past.

Many bigger districts across the state have an administrator or a team of staffers who craft grant applications. But in the many small districts in rural northern Michigan, school leaders squeeze such work between lunch supervision, substitute teaching and, in at least one district, running a front loader to remove snow from the parking lot.

In Posen, situated among pine forests of Presque Isle County in the northeast Lower Peninsula, some grants don't get completed because Wesner doesn't have the time. Others only get her attention late at night after basketball games or before the sun rises across the nearby potato fields.

"It kills me that I have to do these between zipping coats and recess duty," Wesner said.

Michigan's rural students, who have fewer opportunities than many of their peers in more populated school settings, are further disadvantaged by the state's reliance on competitive grants, say local and state education officials. School leaders say that means students in districts like Posen are less likely to have access to classes from welding and computer programming to advanced placement courses for college credit.

See **FUNDING**, page A2

The Tribune:
Celebrating
Our 127th Year

Support the Local Businesses
Who Help Support
Our Community!

FUNDING

From page A1

In the 2024-25 school year, there were 102 state grants totaling about $7 billion available to districts. That's an average of almost three per school week for grants that, for some, can take days to complete.

And while complaints about those applications led to a lessening of grants this year, superintendents, state officials and policymakers agree the system continues to harm the small school districts.

"They're minnows competing against sharks," said Craig Thiel, research director at Citizens Research Council, which published a report last year criticizing the reliance on some grants.

Winners and losers

Even before the state's huge increase in funding buckets, a 2013 study found that Michigan had 50 categories of school funding – five times the national average.

Many categorical grants are meant to reduce disparities by directing money to underserved populations, such schools that enroll more low-income or English as a second language students. There are also categorical spending funds that specifically funnel money to small districts, such as dollars for transportation costs in rural areas.

But in practice, small districts often don't have time to complete the forms to compete for the $351 million (1.7 percent of total state funding) in state competitive grants available this year, and a portion of the $1.1 billion in formula grants for which payouts are determined by a formula established by the Legislature.

"There's growing agreement that the budget is too categorical (grant) heavy," said Vanessa Keesler, former deputy superintendent at the Michigan Department of Education and now president of education advocacy group Launch Michigan.

The Michigan Department of Education doesn't track how small, rural schools fare with competitive grants compared to larger districts.

Still, local and state school leaders who spoke to Bridge were unanimous in their belief that small districts – with enrollments of less than 1,000 – likely get less than their share.

About 87,000 students attend those schools, about 6 percent of all public school students but almost a third of Michigan's traditional public districts (170 of 539.)

In those schools, administrators often do multiple jobs, like Katy Xenakis-Makowski, superintendent of Johannesburg-Lewiston Area Schools, which straddles remote sections of Otsego, Montmorency and Oscoda counties.

She does the 600-student district's communications and social media, as well as serving as its chief financial officer and grant writer.

The school has career tech education programs in construction, business and accounting, and is in the same competition as Posen for career tech funds, hoping to offer culinary arts and computer programming.

Julie Goldberg / The Alpena News

Posen Consolidated Schools Superintendent Michelle Wesner looks at video feeds from the security cameras in 2018, in her office, in Posen, Mich. Students in the 200-student district often pitch in to help the about four dozen school employees who are stretched thin with multiple responsibilities.

It was 5:30 p.m. on the deadline day of Feb. 27 before Xenakis-Makowski hit send on her application.

"In this office, it's (the school secretary), our finance director who is on vacation, and me," Xenakis-Makowski told Bridge on a recent visit.

To illustrate the imbalance in staff capacity, Xenakis-Makowski points to new State Superintendent Glenn Maleyko's former school district, the 20,000-student Dearborn City School District, which has more administrators (111) than Johannesburg-Lewiston has total employees (107), according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

"We try to insulate our students as much as we can, … (but) we have left money on the table just because we couldn't make it happen in the timeframe or do the data collection that was required."

For example, last school year, the district had been approved for a $2,500 grant for a literacy camp, but the paperwork to get the funds transferred was too cumbersome for the time Xenikas-Makowski could devote.

"It just wasn't worth it," she said, shaking her head.

Across the Mackinac Bridge in Chippewa County, 600-student Rudyard Area Schools faces similar hurdles. With 600 students spread across 402 square miles, the district spends 11 percent of its budget on transportation before kids get to class, compared to a statewide average of between 3 percent and 4 percent.

On the day Bridge visited, Superintendent Tom McKee was up at 3 a.m. to drive roads to see if they are safe for school. When school started, he filled in for a paraprofessional who was absent, and after school, he planned to run a front-loader to clear snow off the school parking lot for a girls' basketball game that evening.

It's rare when grants make it to the top of his to-do list. Recently, he had to jettison a plan to apply for a $20,000 library grant because the paperwork "might have taken me three weeks.

"A lot of times, when those grants come out, it's a balance of how much money I might get and how much of my time I need to commit," McKee said.

Rudyard is luckier than many other small rural schools like Posen and Johannesburg-Lewiston, because it receives $690,000 from an Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District millage for career tech.

The impact of that tax is evident in Rudyard's sprawling CTE corridor, with five different programs operating daily. There is furniture and cabinetry room with an assortment of tools and a 3D printer that was buzzing with activity from more than a dozen students on a day Bridge visited. In a nearby room, a student was tinkering with a robotic arm, and an underwater drone was ready for testing with a new gyroscope.

Even with the millage, Rudyard is in the running for MDE's career tech grant, with McKee saying he'd like to add cosmetology and middle school agriculture.

Money for 'life skills'

Meanwhile, the closest thing Posen has to career tech is an old wood shop. On a recent day, high school students built a bench from boards donated by a local lumberyard, to add to the collection of benches in the hallways students have made over the years. Last year, students built a deer blind for a fundraiser at the Posen Potato Festival.

Past a cement block wall is the room where the welding program would be housed if the district gets funding. It is lined with decades-old machinery. A large chain hangs from the ceiling, looming over a thick wooden work table scarred with nail holes and burn marks that Wesner acknowledges were likely by the grandparents of some current students.

She is applying for a CTE expansion grant, which is from a pot of $68.5 million the Legislature set aside for high schools and middle schools in underserved CTE regions to grow their career tech offerings. The $80,000 grant would be used for welding equipment and to hire an instructor for a program that superintendent Wesner says would teach "life skills" for the primarily low-income teens who know they need to become self-sufficient in a region with few services and low pay.

Without a grant, Posen's Wesner said there's not an easy way to carve out the $80,000 needed for a welding career tech program out of her $3.3 million annual budget.

"That would be cutting three paraprofessionals, cutting busing or cutting a teacher," she said. "Not one of those things are acceptable."

Just 4 of the 10 districts in Otsego, Cheboygan and Presque Isle counties have access to any CTE programs. Distance between districts in the 2,100 square-mile region makes it difficult for students to travel to another school where career programs are available.

A welding program would come in handy for students repairing tractors or piecing together four-wheelers, Wesner said. But with less than 50 high schoolers in the district, only about five to seven students would attend.

Meanwhile, her application, along with similar career tech grant requests from Johannesburg-Lewiston and Rudyard, will compete for dollars with programs around the state, from expanding agriscience in Alcona Community Schools to a middle-school aeronautics program in Wayne County.

ZIP 'shouldn't matter'

Both former State Superintendent Michael Rice and Michigan's new top school leader Maleyko have been critics of a system where the state picks winners and losers.

"Providing more funding through grants where districts have to meet the eligibility criteria to receive the funding and less funding through grants for which districts would have to compete would be helpful," Maleyko said.

Another option is for the Legislature to create yet another pot of money for intermediate school districts to hire professional grant writers to support small schools. John Severson, executive director of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts, isn't a fan of the idea, saying it would exacerbate the dog-eat-dog atmosphere where schools "chase uncertain dollars."

The better solution, Severson said, is to move the money now in competitive grants to "weighted" formulas that get dollars to all schools that meet the criteria. An example: more funds for small schools or rural transportation.

Meanwhile, the application deadline has passed for the career tech competitive grant that Rudyard, Johannesburg-Lewiston and Posen are bidding on. They've been told by state officials to expect an answer by the end of March.

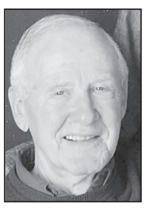
"I'm hoping they look at it from the lens of who doesn't have these programs to offer students, and not just how many students there would be," said Posen's Wesner

An hour south, Johannesburg-Lewiston's Xenakis-Wakowski is hoping for the yes, but girding for a no.

"We're responsible to educate all the children in our state, no matter what ZIP code they're in," she said. "They should all have equal opportunities, and it's honestly not that way."

OBITUARIES

Marshall Mesecar



Marshall Mesecar passed away peacefully on Sunday, March 15, at the age of 85.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Joyce, and his parents, Bruce and Betty Mesecar and brother Kenny.

Marshall is survived by sons Tim (Marlana) and Doug (Shannon); grandchildren Olivia, Paige, Wade, Rohwan, and Ellarie; his sister Carolyn and numerous nieces, nephews and friends.

Marshall was born and raised in South Haven, Mich. and spent the majority of his life in Grand Rapids communities, such as Middleville and Caledonia. For the last two years, he resided at Brookdale Montrose in Akron, Ohio, where he was affectionately called "Grandpa" by the care team.

Marshall served in the U.S. Navy and then became a certified Die Maker during his thirty years working at General Motors.

Marshall enjoyed working on cars, riding his motorcycle around West Michigan with his buddies, putzing around the garage and supporting his kids and grandkids in all of their activities. He will be greatly missed.

There will be a celebration of life ceremony this summer, with more details to follow.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Tunnel to Towers Foundation at www.t2t.org, which supports fallen 9-11 first responder families and homeless veterans.

Eugen Gawreliuk

June 28, 1930 – March 17, 2026

Eugen Gawreliuk, the man, the myth, the legend of South Haven, Mich. passed away March 17, 2026 at the age of 95.

A celebration of life bash is being planned for a later date.

Known for wearing his instantly recognizable red cap, telling cringey jokes, his love of beer and European soccer and regaling listeners with his adventures of mountain climbing in Europe. (He fell off a mountain once, true story!)

Eugen's extraordinary life began on June 28, 1930. Born to Austrian parents Alexander Gawreliuk and Olga Straub in Tsudin, Romania.

After surviving WW2 in Europe as a child, he attended the University of Munich, earning a master's degree in engineering. Shortly after graduation, Eugen immigrated to the US, where he eventually started his own business in 1970 after realizing he couldn't tolerate working for anyone else. His business, System Components Inc, is still in operation, proudly family owned and operated.

At the ripe age of 49, Eugen finally found a woman who could match his chaotic, adventurous energy and married Mary Rossiter-Thornton in Dublin, Ireland on Sept. 15, 1979. They were married nearly 50 years at the time of his death. They have one daughter, Alexandra.

Preceding him in death are his parents and brother, Armin Gawreliuk.

To close out with one of his favorite jokes:

A man walks into a restaurant and orders soup for lunch. When he receives it, he notices a fly in it. He calls over the waiter and asks "Waiter, what is a fly doing in my soup?". The waiter takes out his glasses, leans close to the bowl and answers "It appears to be the back stroke, sir."

Prost Eugen, happy climbing!

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be directed to:

St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, TN 38105

Those wishing to share a memory of Eugen online may do so at www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services, 269-637-0333.

Shirley Strickling

Shirley Strickling, age 88, of Bangor, passed away on March 17, 2026 holding the hand of her husband, Gib Strickling, of 44 years.

Shirley loved working in her gardens, spending time with family and friends and spending time watching her favorite soap operas and westerns.

She leaves behind her beloved husband, Gib; step-daughter, Kathryn Gearhart; grandchildren, Kim (Roy) Collum, Brandon (Jill) Williams, Bailey (Joe) Riner, Ashley (Travis) Putman, Aaron (Tanya) Williams, Tory (Rich) Long, Hope (Rick) Hipes, Justin (Sabrina) Williams, Lindsey Williams, Justin Williams, Jared Williams and Jordan (Hailey) Williams. She also leaves behind great-grandchildren, Tyler, Kendall, Myla, Jake, Tyson, Ava, Brayden, Addison, Camden, Brandon, Jayden, Evan, Josie, Evie, Kamryn and Mason.

She is preceded in death by her four sons, Ray, Steve, Mike and Jeff Williams; stepsons, Ronald and Donald Strickling; and sisters, Karen and Diane.

According to her wishes, cremation has taken place and there will be a private family service to be held at a later date.

Arrangements entrusted to the Bangor Chapel, D.L. Miller Funeral Home. www.dlmillerfuneralhome.com.

VOLUNTEERS

From page A1

said in the release. "It's about preserving the mechanical heritage of Michigan and giving families an unique, hands-on way to experience history. We just need a few more hands to help us cross the finish line."

This year marks the final push for a project three years in the making. Once completed, the 15-inch gauge railroad will become a permanent attraction at the museum.

"Visitors will soon be able to experience the sights, sounds, and smells of a bygone era by riding behind a grand scale steam locomotive," the release stated.

The Michigan Flywheelers Museum, located at 06285 68th Street, is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of antique gas and steam engines and farm equipment. Located on 80 acres in South Haven, the museum features a "Farm Town" from the 1920s, a sawmill and various exhibits showcasing the evolution of machinery.

For more information, contact the museum at 269-639-2010 or michiganflywheelers@yahoo.com.

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www.southhaventribune.net

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BRONSON

Water main construction to impact traffic in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven recently announced temporary closures and detours will be in place near the intersection of Dunkley Avenue and Dyckman Avenue to accommodate water main construction.

According to a news release, work will occur in phases through early May and will impact both vehicle and pedestrian traffic near the bridge.

During the initial phase, Dunkley Avenue will be closed to thru traffic for several weeks, beginning at Dyckman Avenue and extending 300 feet north. Traffic will be detoured around Phoenix Street, Blue Star Highway, and Wells Street. Bridge traffic remains unimpacted.

The second phase will require closure of the westbound lanes of Dyckman Avenue and northbound lane of Dunkley Avenue. The southbound lane of Dunkley will be reopened.

Westbound traffic seeking to cross the bridge will be detoured to Phoenix Street, Blue Star Highway, and Wells Street. Access to the bridge will be available from Dunkley via a right turn only onto Dyckman Avenue.

Eastbound traffic on Dyckman Avenue will remain open, with lane shifts in place. The eastbound bike lane on Dyckman Avenue, between the bridge and Williams Street, will be closed during the second phase.

“Pedestrians are advised to follow all posted sidewalk closures and remain clear of construction areas throughout the project,” the release stated.

The final phase will include asphalt paving and concrete restoration. Additional single-day closures will be required to complete this work and will be announced in advance.

This project is part of a multi-year, $42 million capital improvement initiative by the South Haven Area Water Sewer Authority to upgrade the community’s water and wastewater infrastructure.

“We appreciate your patience and understanding during this important infrastructure project,” the release stated.

For more information,go to the City of South Haven’s website at www.southhavenmi.gov, or contact the Department of Public Works at 269-637-0737.

Photo provided / South Haven Area Emergency Services

A South Haven Area Emergency Services firefighter stretches a hose while slogging through the mud from the roadway Friday to a “burning-out building” in Casco Township.

Farm animals unharmed in Casco Township fire

By TRIBUNE STAFF

CASCO TOWNSHIP — Several animals escaped a fire unscathed during a recent building fire in Casco Township.

According to a news release from South Haven Area Emergency Services, first responders were called Friday to a “burning-out building,” where they had to navigate an inaccessible muddy road in Casco Township.

SHAES responded at 8:20 a.m. Friday to reports of a building fully engulfed in flames at 71st Street, along Interstate 196.

The fire could not be reached by emergency vehicles, forcing firefighters to stretch hundreds of feet of hose while slogging through the mud from the roadway.

Fire officials said several goats, a horse and a dog escaped the flames Friday.

The cause of the fire is unknown and remains under investigation.

Photo provided

Soul Massage Therapy was recently welcomed as a new member of the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Soul Massage Therapy offering services in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Soul Massage Therapy as a new chamber member.

According to a news release, the chamber hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony at Soul Massage Therapy’s location in the historic Downtown Bangor Train Depot.

“Soul Massage Therapy offers a welcoming and calming environment where clients can focus on their wellness and relaxation,” the release stated.

Licensed therapist Becky Snyder provides personalized massage services designed to meet a variety of needs, including stress relief, pain management, athletic recovery and overall relaxation.

The space is designed for comfort, featuring a serene atmosphere that encourages clients to unwind and restore balance to both body and mind.

“By offering professional, high-quality massage therapy, Soul Massage Therapy provides residents and visitors with accessible options to support their health and well-being,” the release stated. “Their services not only enhance individual wellness but also contribute to the region’s growing health and wellness offerings, making them a valued addition to the chamber community.”

Soul Massage Therapy is located at 555 Railroad Street in South Haven.

For more information or to book a session, go to www.vagaro.com/gotsoul.

Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

Tyrise Carey, 18, with great grandfather Charles Nathan, votes for the first time ever, in the Michigan primary at the Northwest Activities Center in Detroit on Aug. 5.

Michigan Democrats oppose proposal to bring new voter ID standards

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — The Michigan Democratic Party is formally opposing a potential ballot proposal this fall that would institute new standards to check whether voters are U.S. citizens and to require them to show photo identification.

In a statement Monday, the party said its central committee had endorsed, over the weekend, no votes on both the Americans for Citizen Voting measure and a separate question that automatically appears on Michigan ballots every 16 years about convening a convention to revise the state Constitution.

“Both of these ballot measures would have disastrous effects on our state, and Michigan families cannot afford either one,” said Curtis Hertel Jr., chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party. “The Michigan Democratic Party is urging voters to vote no on both measures.”

While supporters of the citizenship proposal have contended it will help safeguard elections, Hertel labeled it “a blatant attempt from Michigan Republicans to make it harder to vote and disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of Michiganders.”

“This measure would put in place burdensome requirements for voters, force many to re-register to vote and only make the voting process more difficult,” Hertel added. “Michigan’s elections are safe and secure, and this is just a power-grab attempt from Michigan Republicans who are desperate to limit access to the ballot box.”

Americans for Citizen Voting has not yet won a spot on the November ballot. However, earlier this month, the group said it was turning in more than 750,000 petition signatures to try to get there.

If the Bureau of Elections eventually finds that 446,198 of the signatures are valid, the constitutional amendment would be voted on this fall.

Under the measure, the Secretary of State’s office would have to “continually administer” a program to verify that every registered voter in Michigan is a U.S. citizen. In order for someone to cast a ballot and for it to count in an election, the person would either have to have their citizenship verified through the program or provide proof of their citizenship through a document, like a passport or a birth certificate.

On photo identification, the amendment would do away with a provision of current election law that allows people who show up to vote, without an ID, to sign an affidavit to verify their identity.

Jim Runestad, chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, has spoken out in support of the Americans for Citizen Voting initiative.

“The proposed amendment would require the Secretary of State to verify the citizenship of all voters, regularly review the voter rolls, and implement voter ID – while ensuring fairness through free state-issued IDs for those facing hardship,” Runestad said last year. “It’s a clear and constitutional way to protect the value of every lawful vote.”

Currently, under state and federal law, all voters must be U.S. citizens.

In 2025, a months-long review by the Secretary of State’s office identified 15 individuals who allegedly weren’t U.S. citizens but still cast ballots in the November 2024 presidential election in Michigan.

The 15 people were in addition to the University of Michigan student from China, Haoxiang Gao, who allegedly voted illegally in Washtenaw County in October 2024.

On the constitutional convention question, Hertel said it would “put at risk the progress that voters have passed in recent years, including protecting abortion rights and establishing a nonpartisan redistricting process.”

PROGRAM

From page A1

Additionally, as echocardiography technology advances, it is increasingly becoming the first line of assessment, replacing more costly and invasive procedures. The median annual wage for diagnostic medical sonographers is $89,340.

“By addressing an important workforce training need for our health care partners, we open up opportunities for local residents to gain skills needed for these well-paying jobs,” LMC Executive Vice President Ken Flowers said in the release. “These are the types of careers that allow people to build lives in our communities and be part of a vibrant local economy that we all benefit from.”

The addition of the cardiac sonography program has been made possible with the recent renovation and expansion of instructional labs on the college’s Benton Harbor campus. By repurposing space in the C-wing of the main academic building, the program has doubled the number of sonography teaching labs from three to six rooms.

“Experience has shown that on-campus training in the law setting is essential for student success,” Zak said in the release. “We are able to provide consistent training that builds foundational skills and techniques before students enter the clinical training portion of the program.”

LMC’s cardiac sonography program joins the existing OB/GYN and abdominal-extended areas of sonography training. Both of these established programs earned 10-year accreditation renewals from the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) in 2025. The 10-year accreditation is the highest possible and reflects the program’s adherence to rigorous academic and clinical standards.

For more information on this and other LMC health science programs, residents can visit LakeMichigan College.Edu/Academics/Health-Sciences.

South Haven Tribune CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

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0900 LEGALS

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The Settlor, Paul L. Warskow, whose birthdate was September 5, 1958, and who lived at 65839 CR 388, South Haven, MI 49090, died on February 18, 2026.

Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the Paul L. Warskow Revocable Living Trust dated January 3, 2009, as amended, will be forever barred unless presented to Kristen M. Warskow, Trustee, within four months after the date of this publication.

Notice is further given that the Trust will thereafter be assigned and distributed to the persons entitled to it.

Date: March 29, 2026

BY: Kristen M. Warskow
533 Lake Como Circle
Orlando, FL 32803

Lori Thompson (P57022)
Passaro, Kahne, Taylor,
DeFrancesco & Thompson Law
Offices, P.L.L.C.
685 West Main Street
Benton Harbor, MI 49022
Phone: (269) 983-0325

White Space Sells

0900 LEGALS

ATTENTION CITY OF BANGOR RESIDENTS NOTICE TO CUT WEEDS AND GRASSES

According to: CITY OF BANGOR
VAN BUREN COUNTY,
MICHIGAN ORDINANCE NO.
2023-1

SECTION 1. Title and Applicable Season

"This ordinance shall be known and cited as the Bangor Tall Grass and Weed Ordinance and shall be applicable and in full force and effect from April 1st through October 31st of each year."

SECTION 5. Duty to Cut Grass

"The owner and/or occupants of land to which this ordinance applies shall not allow grass or weeds to grow over six inches (6") in height throughout the growing season, including grass and weeds in the right-of-way, and it shall be the duty of all owners and/or occupants of land located in Bangor City either to cut or otherwise destroy by lawful means all tall grass and weeds, as defined in this ordinance, which are growing upon said property, before they reach a seed-bearing stage, and to prevent said weeds from perpetuating themselves and from becoming a detriment to public health. On an undeveloped lot, tall grass and weeds must be cut back at a distance of at least thirty feet from the roadway so as to allow a clear line of site for any person using a sidewalk or roadway."

Residents may obtain a copy of the full ordinance by request to the Bangor City Clerk's office. Phone: 269-427-5831 Email: clerk@cityofbangormi.gov

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN VAN BUREN COUNTY

PUBLICATION NOTICE TO CREDITORS Decedent's Trust Estate

Descendent: Christopher M. Dziepak
Date of Birth: * 04/03/1955

TO ALL CREDITORS: **

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Christopher M. Dziepak who lived at 25623 Pleasant Drive, Mattawan, MI died December 20, 2025, there is no Probate Estate.

Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the Christopher M. and Kathy S. Dziepak Revocable Trust dated 2/2/1994, as amended, will be forever barred unless presented to: Kathy S. Dziepak, Trustee c/o John G. VanSlambrouck, 277 South Rose Street, Suite 6000, Kalamazoo, MI 49007 within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: 3/24/2026

Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone, PLC
John G. VanSlambrouck P32968
Attorney name Bar no.
277 S. Rose St, Ste 6000
Address
Kalamazoo, MI 49007
City, state, zip
(269) 383-5898
Telephone

Kathy S. Dziepak, Trustee
Personal representative
c/o John G. VanSlambrouck-277 S. Rose St, Ste 6000
Address
Kalamazoo, MI 49007
City, state, zip

0900 LEGALS

On behalf of T-Mobile, this will advise interested members of the general public as follows. T-Mobile intends to install six (6) telecommunications antennas at a centerline height of 280 feet on a 500-foot self-support communications tower located at 43255 60th Avenue, Paw Paw, Van Buren County, MI 49079. Lat: 42-12-2.3292, Long: -85-58-14.8764. Members of the public interested in submitting comments on the possible effects of the proposed co-location on properties included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places may send their comments to Lauren Sereno, Trileaf Corporation representative acting on behalf of T-Mobile, 1821 Walden Office Square, Suite 500, Schaumburg, IL 60173; email at l.sereno@trileaf.com or call at (708) 742-2161.

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Meeting Synopsis Casco Township Board Meeting Monday, March 16th, 7:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER: Overhiser called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.
PRESENT: Overhiser, Clevenger, Campbell & Fleming.
ABSENT: Ridley (planned absence due to training)
ITEMS APPROVED: Receptionist/Building Department Assistant Position
Boundary Line Adjustment
Zoning Moratorium on battery energy storage systems, solar energy farms, and data centers.
Noise Ordinance Variance for Silva
Edgewater Resources, Concept D for beach access
Applications to Land & Water Conservation Fund, MDNR Trust Fund Grant and State Appropriation Request for beach access.
ADJOURNMENT:
Allan Overhiser, Casco Supervisor
Rachel Ridley, Casco Clerk

COVERT TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING FOR MSHDA'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) FUNDING FOR THE COVERT TOWNSHIP HOME REHAB PROJECT

Covert Township will conduct a public hearing on April 14, 2026, at 6:00PM at 73943 E. Lake Street, Covert, MI 49043 for the purpose of affording citizens an opportunity to examine and submit comments on the proposed application for a MSHDA CDBG grant.

Covert Township proposes to use $400,000 CDBG funds for repairs and improvements to homes located within the Township and occupied by low and moderate-income homeowners to address health, safety and energy efficiency needs. The project will benefit at least 51% low to moderate income persons. Zero persons will be displaced as a result of the proposed activities.

Interested parties are invited to comment on the proposed project during the above listed public hearing or in advance of the hearing in writing. To submit written comments in advance of the meeting, contact Township Clerk at clerk@coverttwp.com or 269-764-8986 ext. 2 no later than 10 a.m. on April 10, 2026. Alternatively, comments may be submitted in writing to the Township Clerk at 73943 E. Lake Street, Covert, MI 49043.

This notice is posted in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended, (MCL 41.72a(2)(3)) and the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The Covert Township Board will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audio recordings of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at the meeting or public hearing upon 7-day notice to the Covert Township Board.

Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Township Board by writing or calling the following: Wednesday Pritchard, Township Clerk, clerk@coverttwp.com, 269-764-8986 ext. 2.

Township Clerk Signature: Wednesday Pritchard
Date Posted: 03-09-2026
A copy of this notice is on file in the Clerk's Office, located at: 73943 Lake St, Covert, MI 49043

NEWS
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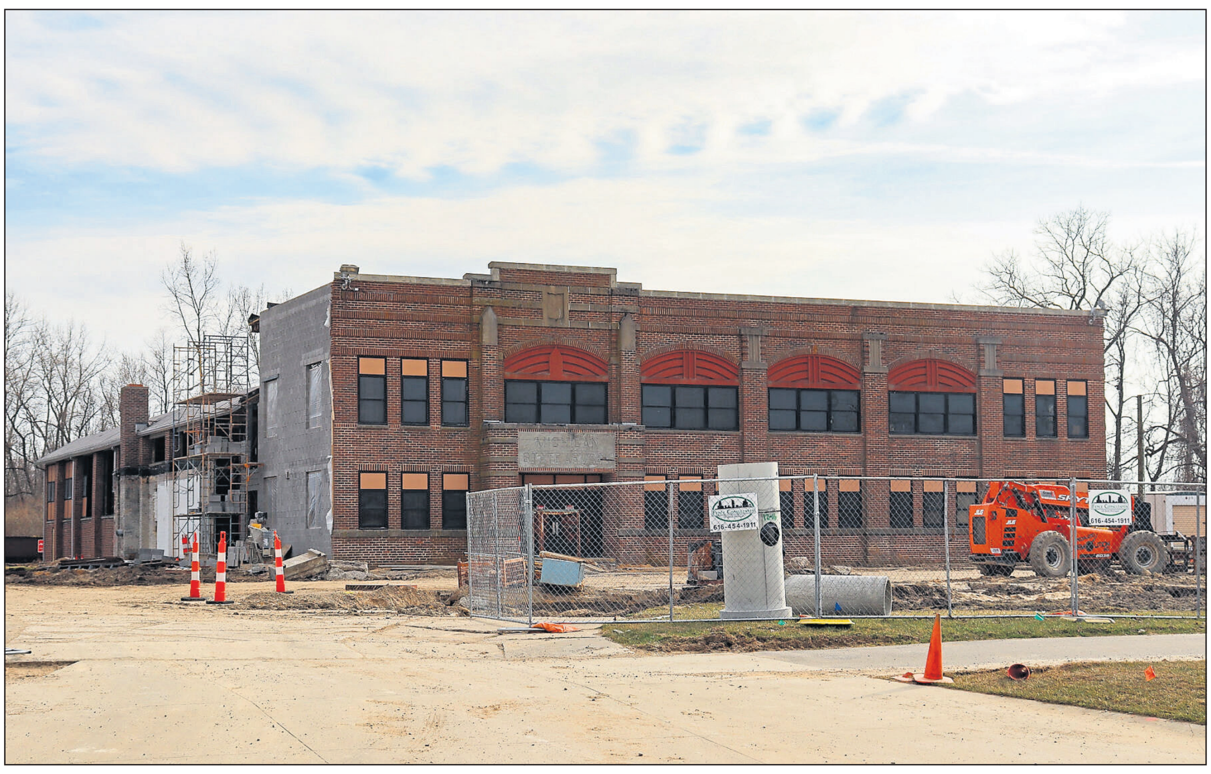

Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Michigan State Armory renovation projects is in full swing to be repurposed into an administration and transportation office.

Housing sales, prices fall in SWMI market

February continues cold streak for homebuyers, sellers

By TRIBUNE STAFF

After a cold start in January for the Southwest Michigan housing market, the February activity did not defrost.

According to a report from the Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors, the number of houses sold in February fell to 137 houses, the lowest level since 2009.

"The inventory of houses for sale, selling prices, and the mortgage rate all dropped below those in February 2025. Selling prices peaked in February 2025 in the year-over-year comparison that includes prices back to 2006," said Luke Jeffries, association executive of the Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors.

In February 2026, Jeffries said the market ended with an inventory of 634 houses for sale, down 9 percent from the 699 houses for sale in February 2025.

Homebuyers were facing a 3.8-month supply of homes, up slightly from the 3.7 supply level in January 2026.

The Freddie Mac mortgage rate in February was 5.98, down slightly from the January rate of 6.10, and down from the 6.15 rate in December 2025 for a 30-year conventional mortgage.

The number of houses sold in February 2026 decreased by 10 percent from what was sold in February 2025. Year-to-date, the number of houses sold decreased by 16 percent.

The average selling price at $338,348 in February 2026 dropped 19 percent from January 2026 and 18 percent from February 2025

The February 2026 median selling price slipped 5 percent below that in February 2025 – $272,000 vs. $285,000. The median selling price in January 2026 was $270,000.

The total dollar volume with fewer sales decreased by 20 percent to $108,987,203 from $135,435,416 in February 2025.

There were three bank-owned or foreclosed homes as a percentage of all transactions for Southwest Michigan homes in February, or 2 percent of all closed transactions. The highest percentage in February was 75 percent in 2009.

Across the country

Existing home sales increased by 1.7 percent month-over-month in February, according to the National Association of Realtors report.

The report provides the real estate ecosystem – including agents, homebuyers and sellers – with data on the level of home sales, price and inventory.

Month-over-month sales rose in the Midwest, South and West, but fell in the Northeast. Year-over-year sales rose in the South and fell in the Northeast, Midwest and West.

Total existing home sales increased 1.7 percent from month-over-month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.09 million in February. Year-over-year, sales decreased 1.4 percent.

"Housing affordability is improving, and consumers are responding," said NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun. "Still, there is a long way to go to return to pre-pandemic levels of transaction activity. There are more than 6 million more jobs than in 2019, yet home sales per year are down by 1 million."

The median existing home price for all housing types in February was $398,000, up 0.3 percent from one year ago.

"Despite the modest gain in home sales, actual housing demand remains muted relative to wage growth and job gains," Yun said. "Wage growth is now outpacing home price growth by almost four percentage points. Mortgage rates are also measurably lower compared to a year ago."

In the Midwest, existing-home sales in February increased 1.1 percent in sales month-over-month to an annual rate of 940,000, down 4.1 percent year-over-year.

Total housing inventory registered at the end of February was 1.29 million units, up 2.4 percent from January and 4.9 percent from one year ago.

"Inventory is growing, but sluggishly," Yun said. "If demand picks up notably in the coming months and outpaces supply growth, home prices will inevitably rise. That is why increasing supply is so important to help limit home price growth, improve housing affordability, and boost transactions."

Miss Blossomtime Pageant, showcase set for next month

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Tickets are now available for next month's 2026 Miss Blossomtime and Mr. Blossomtime Pageant/Showcase of Queens.

According to a news release, this year's theme is "Blossomtime: Oh the places you will see," which has inspired two evenings of entertainment, music and glamour.

Hosting the evening festivities for the Blossomtime Festival will be Lainie Lu Von Behren, a former Miss Blossomtime, and Phil McDonald, athletic director to Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Schools, for the two-day show.

2025 Mr. Blossomtime Ross Bettich will crown the 29th Mr. Blossomtime at the Mr. Blossomtime and Showcase of Queens Pageant at 6:30 p.m. April 12. General admission tickets are $40, while limited premier seating tickets are available for both nights at $45 each.

2025 Miss Blossomtime Ava Starbuck will crown the 93rd Miss Blossomtime at the Miss Blossomtime Pageant the following evening at 7 p.m. April 13.

Don Campbell / PMG file photo

Mr. Blossomtime contestants entertain the crowd during the Mr. Blossomtime Competition & Showcase of Queens held at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center in 2025.

General admission tickets are $40. Limited premier seating tickets are available at $45 each and the program price for both evenings will be $10.

The Mr. Blossomtime Pageant/Showcase of Queens and Miss Blossomtime pageants are held at Lake Michigan College, Mendel Center Mainstage – with 21 community queens and 26 community kings vying for the titles of Miss and Mr. Blossomtime and their respective royalty courts.

For more information, call the Blossomtime office at 269-982-8016 or stop by at 2330 S. Cleveland Ave. in St. Joseph to buy tickets in advance by cash or check.

Ticket availability is limited and may not be available at the door.

Farmers reminded to clear road rights-of-way for safety reasons

By TRIBUNE STAFF

LAWRENCE — As spring approaches and the planting season begins, the Van Buren County Road Commission is reminding area farmers to keep road rights-of-way clear for public safety and maintenance purposes.

According to a news release, crops must be planted at least 14 feet from the road's edge or behind the back slope of an existing ditch.

"Planting within the right-of-way is done at the farmer's own risk and the road commission cannot offer compensation for any crop loss within that area, in accordance with Policy 2022-02," the release stated.

The road commission performs regular mowing cycles throughout the growing season to maintain safe sightlines along roadsides and intersections. Any crops planted within the right-of-way will be mowed during normal maintenance operations.

In late summer, the road commission also conducts chemical vegetation management to control brush and woody growth. Road rights-of-way are reserved for road signs, drainage and public utilities and are typically 66 feet wide (33 feet on each side of the road's centerline).

To review a copy of the Board of County Road Commission's Policy 2022-02, Right-of-Way Mowing, Brush Control and Spraying Policy, go to the road commission's website at www.vbcrc.org/policies.

For more information and questions, contact the road commission's Managing Director, Bret Witkowski, at 269-674-8011, Extension 222, or via email at BretWitkowski@vbcrc.org.

The Road Commission's Policy complies with the standards created by law (MCL 247.665b).

The South Haven Tribune makes every effort to ensure accuracy in its stories. If you believe there is an error, please call 269-637-1104 to be directed to the appropriate editor.

The Spotlight
A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

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SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

South Haven Memorial Library: Food Drive for non-perishable food items from March 5 through 31. For each item brought, you will be eligible for $0.50 in fine forgiveness up to $5.00 total.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: March 1 through 31 "What Grew in Larry's Garden" by Laura Alary and Kass Reich StoryWalk. The museum is closed but appointments can be scheduled by calling 630-842-9458.

Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for students grades 6 through 12 every Monday from 3 to 5 p.m.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
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WELCOME !
U OF M RUNNERS

Photo provided

The University of Michigan running Club recently ran across Michigan, ending in South Haven, to raise money for the Special Olympics.

April

3 – South Haven Memorial Library: Play-doh play date for preschoolers at 11 a.m.

7 – Scott Club: Tracks of Progress – Black River Railroad at the First Congregational church at 651 Phoenix Street at 1 p.m.

7 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Dowagiac High School at 4 p.m.

7 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Dowagiac High School at 4 p.m.

7 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Buchanan High School at 4:30 p.m.

8 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

9 – South Haven Indivisible: "The Impact of Christian Nationalism in the US" speaking engagement from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Lake Michigan College, South Haven campus. John Wakefield speaking.

9 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity team against Bridgman Public Schools at 4 p.m.

9 – Tennis: Girls varisty team against Hackett Catholic Prep at 4:30 p.m.

11 – Michigan Flywheelers Museum: Black River Railroad project volunteer meeting at 10 a.m.

11 – Soccer: Girls varsity team compete in the Shoreline Shootout beginning at 10 a.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

11 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team compete in the Shoreline Shootout beginning at 10 a.m. at Northshore Elementary School.

13 – South Haven Garden Club: Meeting with guest speaker Nancy Ellis and Decoupage activity. Bring a pot or vase. Social time beginning at 12:30 p.m. with the general meeting beginning at 1 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team against Berrien County Homeschool at 5 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Lawton High School at 5 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against St. Joseph High School at 6:15 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls varsity team against Lawton High School at 6:30 p.m.

14 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity team at 4 p.m.

14 – Track: Middle school boys and girls teams at the SAC Quad at 4:30 p.m.

14 – Softball: Girls junior varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

15 – Golf: Boys junior varsity team compete in the SAC JV Jam at 4 p.m. Hawkshead.

15 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Otsego High School at 4:15

15 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Berrien County Homeschool at 5:15 p.m.

15 – Track: Boys and girls varsity teams compete in the SAC Tri with Bridgman and Gobles schools at 4:30 p.m.

16 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Mattawan High School at 4 p.m.

16 – Soccer: Girls junior varstiy team against Berrien Springs High School at 5 p.m.

16 – Soccer: Girls varsity soccer against Berrien Springs High School at 6:30 p.m.

17 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon.

21 – Scott Club: Journey to the End of the World – The Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antartica. Location to be determined. Begins at 1 p.m.

21 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Coloma High School at 4 p.m.

21 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Coloma High School at 4 p.m.

21 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Black River Public School at 4:30 p.m.

22 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

23 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Allegan Public Schools at 4:30 p.m.

24: South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafe from 11 a.m. to noon.

25 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "Invasive Species: What to Know Before You Start Planting" with Jena Johnson from the Van Buren Conservation District from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

27 – Golf: Boys varsity team compete in the SAC Jam at 4 p.m. at Hawkshead.

27 – Track: Boys and girls teams compete in the SAC Tri with Allegan and Coloma schools at 4:30 p.m.

27 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Bloomingdale High School at 5 p.m.

27 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Coloma High School at 6:15 p.m.

28 – Track: Boys and girls middle school teams compete in the SAC Quad at 4:30 p.m.

28 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

28 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team against Hartford Public School at 5 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Bridgman Public School at 5 p.m.

29 –Soccer: Girls middle school team against Plainwell Schools at 6:15 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls varsity team against Bridgman Public Schools at 6:30 p.m.

30 – South Haven Speaker Series: Ambassador Bridget Brink speaking on "Why Ukraine and Eastern Europe Matter." Refreshments available at 6:30 p.m. Program begins at 7 p.m. at Lake Michigan College, South Haven campus.

30 – Softball: Girls junior varsity team against Harper Creek High School at 4 p.m.

30 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity team against Hopkins High School at 4 p.m.

30 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Galesburg-Augusta High School at 4:30 p.m.

Canadian's DNA taken at Blue Water Bridge by border agents, retiree says

By MELISSA NANN BURKE
The Detroit News (TNS)

WASHINGTON — A pair of House Democratic lawmakers are questioning Trump administration officials about why a Canadian retiree was required to provide a DNA sample under the threat of jail time while trying to cross the Blue Water Bridge into Port Huron, Michigan.

Kevin Larson, 68, of Kincardine, Ontario, has no known criminal record and was trying to cross the border to Michigan on Oct. 18, 2025, to attend a No Kings protest in Port Huron against the policies of President Donald Trump, according to the lawmakers.

After three hours, during which he was subjected to fingerprinting, a phone search and the collection of his DNA via a cheek swab, he was denied entry, Larson told The Detroit News on Wednesday.

When he asked the officer why he was being turned away, Larson said he was told it was due to the nature of his planned activity, i.e., attending an anti-Trump protest.

U.S. Customs and Border Patrol didn't charge Larson with any crime or immigration violation, nor was he formally detained before being returned to Canada, according to Democratic U.S. Reps. Debbie Dingell of Ann Arbor and Jamie Raskin of Maryland. Their Tuesday letter was addressed to Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Attorney General Pam Bondi ahead of this weekend's next No Kings rallies on March 28.

"You may not have heard, but Canada is our major trading partner, our friend, our neighbor, and one of our strongest allies in defending democratic freedom around the world against fascism and authoritarianism," Dingell and Raskin wrote.

"Canadians and Americans regularly cross the border in both directions to shop, work, and visit family. Episodes like this risk undermining that longstanding relationship and are already contributing to a chilling effect on cross-border travel and engagement."

The Department of Homeland Security and CBP did not respond to questions from The Detroit News on Tuesday or Wednesday about the agency's basis and practices for DNA collection or why Larson was denied entry at the Blue Water Bridge.

Who is the retired Canadian who was denied entry to Michigan for a No Kings rally?

Larson is a retired power plant health physicist who spent his career teaching radiation safety training to workers at a power plant in Ontario, Larson said. The blog Shifting Gears first reported his CBP encounter.

"It was chilling and upsetting and, at one level, it's heartbreaking. I told you stories about how dear I hold the relationship between Canada and the U.S.," Larson said in a Wednesday interview.

"At the very least, I want my DNA destroyed. It does not belong in a criminal database, which is where I understand it went."

Dingell and Raskin are demanding answers from the Republican Trump administration about why Larson was denied entry and the basis for requiring Larson to submit a DNA sample under threat of criminal prosecution.

They also want to know CBP's policy and criteria for DNA collection, how it's being implemented at ports of entry and how many individuals have been required to provide DNA at ports of entry while not being charged with or suspected of a crime.

When can federal agencies take DNA samples from suspects, foreign visitors?

The federal government does have the power to collect DNA from individuals who are convicted, arrested or facing charges or from non-citizens detained by federal agents. A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security told NPR that federal law actually requires federal law enforcement to collect DNA samples from individuals arrested or facing charges.

Last week, NPR reported that it found six protesters in Illinois, Oregon and Minnesota who described federal immigration officers taking samples of their DNA after they were arrested in recent months.

CBP guidance dated December 2020, however, said that CBP does not collect DNA from aliens held at a port of entry during a consideration of admissibility and not subject to further detention or proceedings, or from aliens lawfully in or being processed for lawful admission into the United States.

The CBP document also said the DNA collected is added to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's CODIS database.

"As a Canadian, I care so much, and I appreciate the prosperity and security we've benefited from by having such a great neighbor," Larson said.

"I felt an obligation to go to Port Huron and walk with people with my flag and to let them know we care about you guys. I knew going across the border there probably was a 50-50 chance they'd send me back, but I knew I had to try."

What happened between the Canadian retiree and border agents

That morning in October, Larson had printed out driving directions to the site of the No Kings rally in Port Huron that he had on the front seat of his car. He wanted to attend the protest to let Americans know that "we care about you guys," he said.

When asked the purpose of his visit at the screening booth, Larson declared to the CBP officer on the Blue Water Bridge that he was going to the No Kings rally, he said. The officer then asked if Larson had any signs, and Larson replied that he did not, just a Canadian flag that he had permission to display at the protest, he said.

The officer informed Larson that he had been flagged for a "random check" and should pull over to the CBP building.

CBP gave him a document attesting that he wouldn't provide assistance to terrorists, and he signed it. The officers took his picture and fingerprinted him.

"At no time did they say I was being arrested, investigated for a crime or that I'd broken any immigration law or anything," Larson said.

Canadian told he faced a year in prison for refusing to provide a DNA sample

He initially refused to provide a DNA sample for privacy reasons, but the officer and his supervisor said Larson risked being charged, facing a year in prison.

"I did say yes to the DNA sample, mainly because I didn't want to get any sort of ban on coming into the states," said Larson, who has a cousin living in Georgia whom he visited regularly.

"I talked to the one main officer that I was working with, and I said: Why is this all happening?" Larson added. "He said – and I wrote it down – You are being denied entry 'due to the nature of your planned activity.'"

However, the CBP document that he was sent home with lists the reason that his entry was denied as being "insufficient evidence provided for intended purpose of entry to the U.S."

Larson contended the document makes a false statement, as the CBP officers had listened to his story and reviewed the paperwork on his passenger seat, including email instructions from the protest organizer and a map to the protest site at Pine Grove Park.

The paperwork also claims that Larson had no documents with him, which is untrue because he carried his Canadian passport, he said.

Al-Van Humane Society
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Meet our Pet of the Week, Petunia!
Meet Our Pet of the Week, Petunia! Petunia is a beautiful calico with a gentle heart and a love for the simple things in life like sunny windows and a good bird-watching session. She's incredibly sweet and enjoys head scratches, and she'll be sure to let you know when she's ready for some attention. If you're looking for a loving companion who will happily keep you company and brighten your day, Petunia might just be your perfect match. Submit an adoption survey at al-van.org/adopt.

Next Microchip Clinic
Keep your pet safe all year long! Sign-up today for Al-Van Humane Society's next quarterly microchip clinic on March 28th from 12pm–2pm at Decadent Dogs. Give your pet a lifetime of security and peace of mind for you for just $25 per pet. Drop in anytime during clinic hours. No appointment required. For more information visit al-van.org/microchipping or call (269)637-5062.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR) and Kitten pate food.

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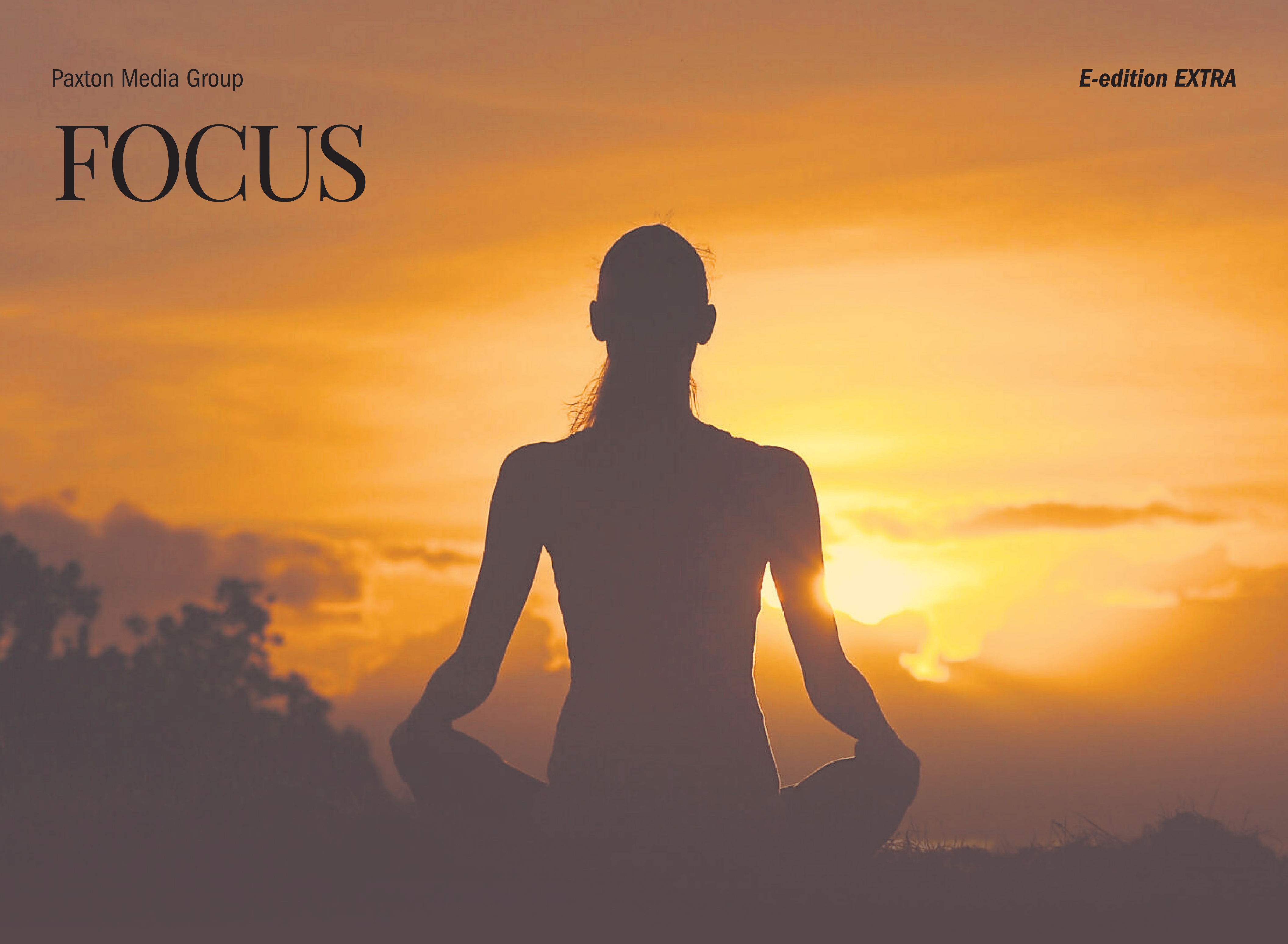

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The long history of silent meditation retreats and the individuals who helped shape them

By DANIEL M. STUART
Associate Professor of Religious Studies,
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Silent retreats have become increasingly common in the United States in recent years.

To calm down and reset their nervous systems, people relinquish their phones and reading materials and commit to speaking at a bare minimum to learn practices of self-awareness.

Silent meditation and silent prayer have shaped spiritual lives within a variety of religious traditions for thousands of years. Today, however, those practices are often being offered in secular settings.

One particular form of meditative silence, the 10-day mindfulness retreat, has had an outsized impact. Research I have carried out over the past two decades sheds light on the role of the Burmese meditation master Sayagyi U Ba Khin in popularizing mindfulness meditation. The term "sayagyi" means "respected teacher."

Ba Khin was one of a small number of prominent Buddhist lay meditation teachers in late colonial and early postcolonial Burma. His silent, 10-day retreat became a model for a wide range of intensive meditation traditions. Three of Ba Khin's students were instrumental in bringing his teaching to the United States.

The emergence of mass meditation

Mindfulness meditation practices can be traced to ancient India. The clearest historical evidence of such practices comes from the teachings of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, and his contemporaries.

Most of these practitioners were monastics or ascetics. Historical questions remain, however, regarding whether such practices were primarily reserved for monastics or widely practiced among laypeople.

The monk and scholar Bhikkhu Analayo argues that the oldest historical sources provide evidence for widespread lay meditation practice beginning in the fifth century B.C.E. Other scholars suggest that laypeople had access only to teachings on devotional practices, such as reflections on the qualities of the Buddha, that would encourage offerings and lay support for the monastic community.

A striking development in the mid-20th century was the emergence of mass Buddhist meditation movements in Southeast Asia. Countries such as Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka promoted meditation among lay people to build national identities in the face of colonialism.

In post-colonial Burma – Myanmar's name until 1989 – being an ideal citizen meant being an ideal Buddhist; meditation was seen as a visible expression embodying that ideal. With the globalization of such meditation practices in the latter half of the 20th century, such meditation practices expanded beyond the borders of these countries.

The Burmese silent retreat

Following Burma's independence in 1948, Ba Khin became its first accountant general – a role in which he developed a close relationship with the first prime minister, U Nu.

With the blessing of U Nu, Ba Khin began teaching meditation to his employees. At the time, many of his students were neither Burmese nor Buddhist; they were civil servants originally working for the colonial government.

THE CONVERSATION

The context of teaching was therefore both lay-oriented – taking place in work contexts – and religiously pluralistic, involving Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

Ba Khin had learned meditation from Maung Po Thet, who was born in colonial Burma in 1873. A farmer by profession, Thet learned meditation from teachers who believed that lay people, and not just monks, should practice meditation.

To make practice accessible, Maung Po Thet introduced a seven-day retreat for lay people. At the time, meditation typically involved longer periods of retreat.

Following his teacher's approach, Ba Khin started teaching 10-day retreats in 1952. He later authorized students to carry his teaching abroad – to North America, Europe, Australia and India.

Globalization of the silent retreat

The most famous of these students was S.N. Goenka. Born in colonial Burma in 1924, Goenka was a wealthy businessman and leader of the Hindu community in Rangoon.

He initially sought out Ba Khin for relief from severe migraine headaches; Ba Khin was known as a healer. Despite reservations about Buddhist practice, Goenka enrolled in a 10-day retreat after experiencing relief from his headaches in an initial encounter with Ba Khin.

The experience proved transformative.

From 1969 until his death in 2013, Goenka devoted his life to spreading Ba Khin's teachings globally while retaining his Hindu identity. Like his teacher, and his teacher's teacher, Goenka taught practices of meditation that focused on the cultivation of continuous concentration on a single object of focus for sustained periods of time.

This was done through the observation of the breath, leading to a comprehensive awareness of bodily sensations in all postures and at all times when not sleeping.

Along with his wife, Ilaichidevi Goenka, he taught hundreds of 10-day retreats and trained assistants to facilitate retreats at roughly 200 meditation centers worldwide.

Millions have participated in these retreats, and many influential meditation teachers in India, Europe, Australia and North America first encountered meditation under Goenka's guidance.

Roots of techno-mindfulness

One particularly consequential aspect of Goenka's work was his use of audio and video recordings, beginning in the 1980s. In the face of increased demand for his courses, Goenka recorded teachings and instructions and established a highly structured retreat format.

This innovation allowed retreats to be facilitated worldwide in his absence, dramatically accelerating the global spread of the practice and foreshadowing later developments, such as meditation apps.

Goenka was also skilled at using the language of universalism to secularize Buddhist meditation, presenting himself as a committed non-Buddhist who nevertheless accessed its benefits.

This approach echoed that of Ba Khin, who spoke of teaching meditation without interfering in his students' personal faith. Such rhetorical tactics proved crucial in making meditation accessible to global audiences.

Two lesser-known figures

Two other students of Ba Khin, rarely mentioned in historical accounts, also catalyzed the study of mindfulness in the U.S.: aerospace engineer Robert H. Hover and Leon E. Wright, a Black Christian theologian.

Robert H. Hover played a crucial role in initiating the scientific study of mindfulness and in the founding of the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts, one of the first U.S. centers dedicated to Southeast Asian Buddhist meditation.

Hover's work helped bring mindfulness into mainstream medicine and society. Jon Kabat-Zinn, who created the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, a program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School to help patients cope with chronic pain and stress, credits Hover as one of his primary teachers.

From the 1970s through the '80s, Hover taught 10-day silent retreats across the U.S., Europe, India and Australia, helping to build communities of meditators through newsletters and informal networks.

Leon E. Wright began teaching Ba Khin's meditation techniques in the U.S. in the late 1950s, well before any of Ba Khin's other students.

Wright's work remained largely unknown because he was working primarily in the Black community. Until quite recently, very little attention has been paid to the role of Black practitioners in the modern history of Buddhism. Over the course of the past decade, however, scholars have begun to fill that gap.

Wright taught Ba Khin's techniques for decades at Howard University and organized silent retreats for the broader public. He was also a spiritual healer with interests in extrasensory perception and psychic experience.

His universalist teachings influenced generations of Black theologians. The Covenant Christian Community, a church in the Washington, D.C., area, continues to practice his meditation teachings in silence as well as gather for communal rituals on Sundays.

When people come to silent retreats today, they rarely learn about the networks and the individuals who made the teachings they receive possible to access, or whose work is seen and which voices may have been silenced.

An awareness of this history enriches the silence of a silent retreat.

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FOCUS

Moral metrics

Are corporate algorithms becoming our new moral authorities?

By BETH DUFAULT
Assistant Professor of Marketing, University of Portland (The Conversation)

You check your credit score before applying for an apartment. Your fitness watch tells you whether you slept well enough. A workplace dashboard measures your productivity. Parents can buy devices that track their baby's breathing and heart rate while they sleep.

Increasingly, numbers tell us how we are doing.

These systems promise something appealing: clear feedback about whether we are behaving well. They appear objective, neutral and data-driven. But they also signal a deeper cultural shift, as algorithms define what counts as virtuous behavior.

In other words, we are living in a world where metrics are being translated into moral judgments. As a researcher who has long studied how markets and technologiesshape moral responsibility, I've seen how these metrics quietly reshape how people understand themselves and how other people judge them.

Defining the good life

For generations, religious congregations structured everyday life for many people, offering templates for identity and for what a "worthy" life should look like.

As societies grow more diverse, however, and as fewer people affiliate with formal religious groups, faiths' moral influence on society is waning. With their authority no longer taken for granted, some religious groups market themselves almost like brands: lifestyle choices that one can choose to follow or ignore.

People start to assemble their own sense of right or wrong from a patchwork of sources – and increasingly, that involves for-profit scores, rankings and dashboards.

Credit scoring offers a clear example of how this works. A credit score seems like an objective measure of financial worthiness.

But the actions required to optimize a score define what worthy financial behavior looks like in U.S. society today. It's not just about paying bills on time. Achieving an optimum credit score most often involves having at least one credit card; keeping a low debt-to-credit ratio, which might involve requesting credit limit increases instead of paying down debt; not canceling any credit cards so that average account length is maximized; and having the "right" credit mix, which often includes a consumer loan. Today, a consumer with no credit cards – something that at one time might have seemed financially virtuous – doesn't develop the kind of "file" that is readily rewarded with a high score, and they might not be able to obtain credit to buy a house or a car.

In our work on consumer credit scoring, consumer culture researcher John Schouten and I found that people often incorporate their credit scores into their sense of identity and narrative about their life, interpreting scores as reflections of their character and morality. A high score feels like a sign of virtue. A low score can trigger feelings of shame or failure and a determination to be better.

One consumer described discovering her credit score for the first time as finding out what kind of person she actually was. Another, working to rebuild his score after a medical debt caused a cascade of defaults, related that he checked it every morning, to see if he was someone people could trust again.

Moral mirrors

Credit scoring is only one example. Health apps convert exercise, sleep and heart rate into performance indicators. Workplace platforms turn everyday tasks into dashboards, rankings and streaks. Reputation systems rate drivers, sellers and freelancers, often with a single number that stands in for trustworthiness.

Even parenting, one of the most emotional human roles, is touched by this logic. Wearable infant monitors translate babies' breathing, oxygen levels and sleep patterns into charts, alerts and "insights." These technologies are marketed as tools for reassurance, but in a 2026 paper, my co-authors and I found that these tools also nudge expectations.

Parents describe feeling that if a device exists that can watch a baby's breathing all night, then a truly responsible caregiver must use it. "All the parents in our social group have one breathing monitor or another," one dad said. "My boss has one. If I could prevent something horrible by spending a little money and watching the monitors, and I didn't, what kind of parent would I be?"

The emotional weight of that shift is striking. One mother said that she felt guilty on the nights she forgot to charge the device – not because anything had gone wrong, but because she had failed to be watchful in the way the market now defines good parenting. Another said simply, "If something happened and I didn't have it on, I don't know how I could live with myself." The monitor had become less a tool than a test.

Measurement can be genuinely useful. When scores appear precise and impersonal, they can feel more solid than the messy, subjective judgments we make in everyday life. But as historian Jerry Muller lays out in "The Tyranny of Metrics," scoring systems subtly embed assumptions about what responsible behavior looks like, then reflect those assumptions back to us as if they were simple facts. A high credit score begins to look like proof of moral worthiness. A steady stream of productive hours on a work dashboard looks like evidence of commitment.

As these metrics spread, they start to stitch together a new, data-driven sense of what it means to be a good person. This shows up in ordinary decisions: choosing a loan because it will help your score; taking your phone on a run so it "counts" toward your fitness goals; waking in the night to check a baby only because the app suggests you should. The line between caring for others and optimizing for a number becomes easy to blur.

Into the void

For centuries, religious traditions, philosophers and moral communities have wrestled with what it means to live a good and virtuous life. Algorithmic scoring systems do not claim to answer those questions, but as traditional forms of moral authority weaken among many Americans, I would argue that algorithmic systems are moving into the void.

They do not claim to answer questions about the soul, but they do offer something that can feel almost as reassuring: clear indicators of whether you're on the right track. A high score, a green check mark, a completed streak – these are small, everyday reassurances that we are, in some sense, measuring up.

The deeper question is how comfortable society is letting these systems become our go-to mirrors for moral self-assessment. Instinctively looking to a number to tell whether someone is doing well as a borrower, worker, patient or parent risks forgetting that numbers can only capture a thin slice of what it means to be a good human being.

Many of these scoring systems are built by for-profit companies with a specific interest in the outcome. They are not designed simply to measure behavior; they are designed to shape it, nudging consumers to continuously improve their scores in ways that make them more valuable, more legible and more profitable to the companies doing the measuring. The goal is not necessarily for you to flourish; it's for your behavior to benefit corporations.

The next time you check your rating or a ranking and feel a small surge of pride or unease, it may be worth pausing to ask: Whose idea of "good" am I seeing reflected there, and is it really the one I want to live by?

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Armando L. Sanchez / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Artist Robert Valadez, 63, in front of his mural in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood on March 2. Valadez, who used to live in Pilsen but moved out to take care of his parents, said he got priced out of Pilsen "ages ago" and wouldn't be able to afford to go back.

Chicago artists warn gentrification is pushing them out of a hub for Mexican mural art

Some are fighting to stay

By MADELINE KING
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

CHICAGO — Vivid blues, yellows and reds make the brick facades along West 18th Street pop. Paintings of faces, birds and other subjects draw foot traffic into alleyways and eyes onto the side of buildings, which house a mix of mom-and-pop shops, taquerias and chains like Dunkin'.

The paintings are evidence of Pilsen's mural movement, which began in the 1960s and cemented the Lower West Side neighborhood's future as a hub for Mexican art.

"The movement was not in a museum and a fancy gallery," said Alejandro Romero, a 77-year-old muralist who has been based out of the neighborhood for over 40 years. "It was in the streets, in the alleys."

But in recent years, rising property values and taxes on the Lower West Side have brought affordability struggles for artists. Some feel the strain of keeping arts spaces open, and others have been pushed out altogether.

In the past decade, at least 12 Pilsen cultural spaces that frequently hosted art and music events have closed, according to Jackie Rodriguez and Gina Pacheco-Gamboa. The two founded 18th Street Casa de Cultura, where they organize cultural gatherings, concerts and art events.

Robert Valadez, a 63-year-old muralist raised in the community, said he's seen this pattern of gentrification in cities all over the globe. Artists move into a place, making it hip, Valadez said, and then white-collar workers follow, driving up prices.

"When I was a kid, nobody wanted to live in Pilsen," Valadez said. "The only white people I ever saw were your teachers and the cops."

A changing neighborhood

Pilsen became a predominantly Mexican community in the '60s when the population more than doubled. Families moved into the neighborhood from the Near West Side due to the construction of the University of Illinois at Chicago's campus. Longtime residents recall the disinvestment they faced, like the fight for garbage collection in the '80s and blackouts in the '90s.

From 2000 to 2013, over 10,000 Hispanic residents left Pilsen, one study from UIC found. In that same time frame, the area's white population grew by 22 percent.

Valadez said he got priced out of Pilsen years ago. He used to work out of Casa Aztlán, a community center that opened its doors to artists. Valadez didn't pay rent at the center, he said, and instead did in-kind work.

Eileen T. Meslar / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Oscar Romero touches up a mural on the viaduct wall near the corner of West 16th and South Carpenter Streets in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood on Sunday, March 8, 2026. Romero painted this mural in 1998 and every year he touches it up.

Hector Duarte, a prolific muralist based out of Pilsen since 1985, also recalled Casa Aztlán's importance to the neighborhood.

"Young people started gathering there, and without really having training as painters or anything like that, they began painting inside the building, outside of it, on the streets and on other houses," Duarte said in Spanish.

Casa Aztlán closed in 2013, when a bank auctioned off the property due to unpaid debts. In 2017, the building's new owner, a real estate developer, painted over the public murals with gray paint. Residents pushed back, and artists, including Duarte and Valadez, repainted the mural on the building's facade with the owner's permission later that year.

Today, the shuttered community center is a modern co-living apartment boasting a theater and fitness space. A bedroom in a shared apartment costs $858 a month, and average studios and one-bedrooms rent for over $1,300 and over $1,900, respectively.

Pilsen rents are rapidly trending upward. Average gross rents in the Lower West Side area increased around 68 percent from 2010 to 2023, according to the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University. Chicago's average gross rent increased only 52 percent in that time frame.

New residential builds are geared toward young, single people, said Docia Buffington, a project manager at the Pilsen Housing Cooperative, making family housing less prevalent.

Single-family home sale prices in the Lower West Side have increased over 250 percent since 2000, according to the Institute for Housing Studies. That's the third-largest price spike in the entire Chicago area.

"This has led to a lot of displacement of families – of Latino families in particular – in Pilsen," Buffington said.

Residents put up a 'Fight To Stay'

Some Pilsen artists and residents have formed groups or used art to stake their claim in the community.

The Pilsen Housing Cooperative works to combat resident displacement by providing permanently affordable housing solutions in designated buildings. According to Buffington, the co-op has around 20 units. Recent building purchases will allow it to double its impact, Buffington said. One new building will include affordable art studio spaces.

Susana Avitia, a 49-year-old actor and Aztec dancer, grew up in Pilsen and began her artistic journey at Casa Aztlán. She said she moved out of the area 10 years ago because of rising rents.

"It was so beautiful back in the day," Avitia said. "It's still beautiful now, but it's a little different."

Avitia returned to Pilsen in December through the co-op. She pays $800 a month for a "perfect" one-bedroom apartment with a patio. Avitia said the home allows her almost 4-year-old son to grow up surrounded by art and expression.

"He can learn to remember who he is and what his background is as he grows and evolves in our culture," she said.

One of Duarte's 80 murals across Chicago can be seen on a Pilsen Housing Cooperative building at 1910 S. Wolcott Ave. Duarte and artist Gabriel Villa painted two tornadoes: one ripping away cultural elements, like a guitar and a paleta cart, and one carrying a family holding hands.

The mural, called "Fight To Stay," symbolizes the struggle to remain in Pilsen, Duarte explained. Over the years, he's seen rising costs of living affect his neighborhood. In 2003, Duarte and other artists launched Pilsen Open Studios, an event that allows the public to visit artists' workspaces. At its peak, it had nearly 40 spaces participating, Duarte said. Now, he estimates the number has dwindled to 25.

Rising costs affect cultural spaces

"Fight To Stay" also pays homage to Mario Castillo's "Peace," a mural at 1935 S. Halsted St. that was later sandblasted away. "Peace" is credited with beginning Pilsen's mural movement in 1968 and inspiring Hispanic murals nationwide.

Castillo, now 80 and no longer living in Pilsen, said art is important to the neighborhood because it is important to Mexican culture.

"Art reflects the spirit of the artist that created it," Castillo said. "And when you get all of the artists from one country together, it's showing the essence of that country."

As the mural movement grew, more artists, including Alejandro Romero, brought color to Pilsen's walls.

Decades ago, Romero said he could afford to leave his Pilsen studio for months at a time to do projects abroad. From 1989 to 2001, he even rented a second studio with an elevator and bathroom in Wicker Park's Flat Iron Arts Building.

Now, Romero said he has to be producing work in his Pilsen studio consistently to afford it.

Romero was, more recently, the curator of La Luz Gallery, which he said displayed Mexican and Hispanic art at the Pilsen Law Center on West 18th Street before closing last year.

"My dream was to create a movement," he said of his work with the gallery.

Romero said the law center's leadership told him the gallery had to close because its sales weren't enough to help pay the building's rising property taxes.

Rodriguez and Pacheco-Gamboa, who have worked together since the early 2000s, said they met when artistic and cultural events were happening in the neighborhood all the time.

Rodriguez said the area still teems with these activities. But with art space closures, it now takes more effort to get events going, she said.

"We don't get taught our culture in school," Rodriguez said. "You look to your neighborhood for that. But if we don't have cultural spaces that are talking about Mexicano and Latino identity, how are our new generations getting that?"

Pacheco-Gamboa and Rodriguez used to host and participate in events at sites in Pilsen that have since closed, like Colibrí Studio and Gallery, Calles y Sueños and Café Mestizo.

The two said the dwindling number of arts spaces was one motivator to get a physical location in 2021 and form 18th Street Casa de Cultura. It now has two more addresses, also along West 18th Street: a healing center in Colibrí's old building and an office.

"We don't want to be the only space," Pacheco-Gamboa said. "The more, the better. Because that's how you get what we had before, when you really have a movement."

Still a thriving arts scene

To Duarte, the arts movement is different but still rooted in Pilsen. He said it helps preserve the neighborhood's culture and identity and pass that along to younger generations.

"Many young people have two cultures," Duarte said. "The one here, and the one their parents come from. They can take the best from both to create a better future."

Those from outside Pilsen continue to recognize its artistic contributions. Pacheco-Gamboa and Rodriguez said they've met people at 18th Street Casa de Cultura's events who traveled from Matteson, Joliet, Elgin and farther.

Pacheco-Gamboa said that despite their distance, those attendees all have connections to the neighborhood they were priced out of.

"People have told us that they would come to our space specifically to bring their kids because then their kids can feel a little bit of what they experienced," Pacheco-Gamboa said. "And it is sad. … We're not trying to be a place so that people can come from far away. We want to be the place with the people."

Artists have also used their craft to speak out against gentrification. Cesáreo Moreno, chief curator and visual arts director for the National Museum of Mexican Art, referenced the "Pilsen is not for sale" art, murals and signs in response to developers buying up properties.

Artists need community support, Moreno said, or they'll leave. And if artists are talking about gentrification, they're not the only ones.

"When the artists are working on a topic or idea, and you see more than one artist working on this topic or idea, you can be sure that's what's on the lips of the community," Moreno said.

Mobile clinics offer a practical way to improve health care access in maternity care deserts

By ADETOLA F. LOUIS-JACQUES
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(The Conversation)

Only three of the 14 counties in north-central Florida provide full access to obstetric care. Six have low access to care – meaning there are fewer than two hospitals offering obstetric care or birth centers per 10,000 births and fewer than 60 obstetric providers. The remaining five counties are maternity care deserts. Approximately 3,400 women of childbearing age live in those deserts.

In 2024, a report found that hospitals across Florida were discontinuing obstetric care due to lack of funding. Eighteen of the state's 21 rural hospitals no longer provide obstetric care.

To address this gap in care, in February 2025 the University of Florida established the OB/GYN Mobile Outreach Clinic. The mobile clinic provides comprehensive maternal health services, including prenatal and postpartum care, breastfeeding support, family planning, annual gynecological exams and preventive health screenings. The only services not offered onsite are deliveries.

We are the director and assistant director of the clinic and a at the University of Florida. Outside of our work with the mobile clinic, we also research interventions to improve maternal health in low-resource settings.

We launched the clinic in February 2025. By the end of 2025, we had provided care to 194 women in 616 visits.

Based on our experience, we believe that mobile clinics focused on maternal health could be an effective way to reach more rural and low-income communities.

Maternity deserts across the U.S.

Two and a half million American women of childbearing age – nearly 4 percent – live in a maternity care desert: a county without a single hospital, birthing center or obstetric health care professional.

Over the past decade, the closure of hundreds of obstetric units has exacerbated this problem, particularly in rural regions. Women in maternity care deserts travel an average of 35 miles to reach a birthing hospital, compared to an average of 9 miles for women in full-access counties.

The maternal mortality rate in the U.S., which peaked during COVID, remains higher than that of most other high-incom e nations. Access to timely prenatal and postpartum care is crucial to preventing pregnancy-related deaths. Studies have shown that traveling longer distances for obstetric care is associated with worse infant and maternal health outcomes.

Our mobile model

Mobile health clinics are vehicles, such as buses or vans, equipped with medical tools and supplies to deliver health care services.

The University of Florida OB/GYN Mobile Outreach Clinic is a retrofitted bus with two exam rooms, an ultrasound machine and supplies for serum and urine testing for prenatal labs. A small dispensary allows providers to give prenatal vitamins and medications for common conditions, such as vaginitis or urinary tract infections. This reduces the need for patients to make additional pharmacy or lab visits or pay for medication.

Care provided at the mobile clinic is free to the patient. If patients are eligible for Medicaid or other health insurance, our team assists them in applying for benefits. In 2023, about 1 in 7 women of childbearing age in Florida were uninsured.

Operating on a different model

The Mobile Outreach Clinic operates twice weekly in consistent, rotating locations, including northeast Gainesville in Alachua County, Lake City in Columbia County, Bronson in Levy County and Trenton in Gilchrist County. Of these locations, only Levy County is a maternity care desert, but all of these locations were selected to care for patients of low socioeconomic status and limited access to care.

We set up the clinic at sites that are already trusted or frequently visited by our target population. This includes family resource centers, churches and public libraries. Patients and families know they can expect us on a consistent day of the week. A core principle of our program is that we show up, no matter what. This ethos has helped us establish and maintain trust with our patients.

Appointments are walk-in or scheduled, with wait times significantly shorter than traditional clinics. Patients are scheduled within a week, generally through referrals from trusted partner agencies or from other patients.

Unlike traditional clinics, which schedule for 15- to 20-minute appointments, the mobile clinic allots 30-60 minutes for patient visits. This allows time to address social needs, transportation barriers, food insecurity or housing needs. The clinical care team is led by nurse midwives and includes a physician assistant, certified nurse-midwives, nurses, a nurse practitioner and lactation consultant, medical assistants and promotoras, community health workers who act as peer educators and patient liaisons in Hispanic communities. Maternal-fetal medicine physicians review ultrasound images remotely.

Operating outside a traditional clinical setting sometimes requires our staff to be flexible and creative to meet the needs of our patients. For instance, the week before Thanksgiving, our clinic was at capacity while parked in a church lot in Trenton. One of our patients needed a nonstress test, and with space limited, the nurse and health educator interpreter worked together to complete the test in a quiet area within the church. The patient received timely care despite the full schedule and space constraints.

Taking health care to the streets

Currently, there are approximately 3,600 mobile health clinics in the United States, with 1,319 tracked through the Mobile Health Map.

These clinics can provide a wide range of services, from disaster relief and mental health care to mammography and dental care, to primary and preventive care. They particularly target low-income and uninsured populations. A study of 811 mobile clinics found that among patients treated between 2007 and 2017, 36 percent were from rural areas, 38 percent were homeless, 55 percent were low income and 56 percent were uninsured.

Mobile health clinics have been shown to improve health by delivering regular care directly to populations that would not have access otherwise.

In a survey of mobile clinic users, patients reported receiving holistic care, feeling safer than they'd felt in other health care settings and interacting with staff who were mindful of health care costs.

Regardless of insurance status, patients said they were able to maintaincontinuity of care, meaning the mobile clinic managed their care consistently and was able to share their records with new providers to ensure they received appropriate care.

Expanding mobile health to pregnant patients

Unfortunately, only 128 of the 1,319 mobile clinics tracked in the mobile health map provide maternal and infant health services, and the services they offer pregnant, postpartum and newborn patients are generally quite limited. As maternity care deserts expand, mobile health clinics could offer a practical solution for meeting prenatal and postpartum care needs.

We believe our model could be replicated elsewhere, and other similar clinics are already up and running, such as the University of Arizona Mobile Health Program.

The primary challenge for mobile clinics is funding, as they are typically free to patients and supported through grants. With projected recent changes to Medicaid and ACA marketplace coverage, even more patients may face limited access to prenatal and postpartum health care.

Studies on mobile health clinics have identified several additional challenges associated with this model of care. Mobile clinics are not equipped to manage emergent complications, complex medical procedures or labor and delivery.

They also face staffing limitations, particularly in finding health care professionals who understand and enjoy the unique opportunities and challenges inherent in providing care on a mobile clinic, in addition to their scheduled clinic or hospital shifts.

But our hope is that as our clinic and others like it demonstrate an improvement in health care in maternal care deserts, increased awareness and support may help expand this model to more communities.

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Health insurance jargon can be frustrating and confusing – here's how to navigate it

By JAMIE HARTMANN-BOYCE and MICHAL HORNÝ
UMass Amherst (The Conversation)

Since the Affordable Care Act subsidies expired at the end of 2025, Americans have undoubtedly been encountering a great deal of confusing information surrounding health care costs and insurance plans.

From five-figure deductibles to premiums higher than people's mortgages, costs are rising across the board.

With this comes difficult decisions around health care plan enrollment. No one can know exactly what their health care needs will be in any given year, so people are forced to hedge their bets in choosing plans.

What plan you pick has a huge impact on what you will end up paying.

However, many Americans don't understand key health insurance terms. For example, people who've completed fewer levels of education and people without health insurance are less likely to understand the jargon. This can get in the way of picking the right plans.

As scholars of health policy, evidence-based health care and health economics, we believe understanding these terms can help you pick what plan might be the best for you.

Frequently encountered health insurance terms

The first of these is your health insurance premium. This is the amount you pay each month for having health insurance coverage, whether or not you use any services. Premiums can be expensive, but they are predictable. Once your premium is set for the year, it won't change.

What's much harder to predict is how much of each medical bill you will have to pay yourself, known as out-of-pocket costs. These are sometimes also referred as "patient cost-sharing" or "copays." These typically come in three forms: deductibles, coinsurance and copayments.

A deductible is how much you need to spend on your health care in a given year before your insurance starts covering any costs. Under plans with a deductible, you pay the full cost of health care services first – essentially as if you did not have health insurance – until your total spending reaches the deductible amount. Once you reach that threshold, your insurance will start paying for your additional medical costs.

But in most plans, even once you hit your deductible, your insurance will still not cover the full cost of your care. You will continue to pay a portion of the bill through coinsurance, which is the percentage of the cost of care that you are responsible for paying. For example, if your coinsurance rate is 20 percent and you receive care that costs US$500, you would pay $100 (20 percent of $500).

What often makes coinsurance confusing is that while the coinsurance rate – the percentage – is usually listed on your health insurance card, you still need to know the total cost of your care to calculate how much you will owe. That cost is difficult to know in advance because reliable health care prices are difficult to find and health care needs – and the services required to treat them – can be unpredictable.

Then there are copayments. This is a fixed amount you pay for a health care encounter, such as $20 for a primary care visit or $150 for an emergency department visit. In everyday language, people sometimes use copay to refer to any amount a patient pays out of pocket. Technically, however, a copayment refers only to a fixed fee paid for a health care service.

Whether through deductibles, coinsurance or copayments, these out-of-pocket amounts can add up quickly. To protect patients, especially those who need a lot of care and could otherwise face devastating medical bills, federal regulations require health insurers to limit how much patients can be asked to pay out of pocket each year for covered services.

This amount is called the out-of-pocket maximum. This is sometimes also called the out-of-pocket cap or out-of-pocket limit. Once your total out-of-pocket spending reaches that limit, your insurance must pay 100 percent of the cost of additional covered services for the rest of the year.

Additional factors to consider

These insurance rules can become even more complicated. Many plans have multiple different deductible amounts, coinsurance rates, copayments and even out-of-pocket maximums, depending on several factors. For example, in family plans, each person may have their own deductible or out-of-pocket maximum, but there may also be thresholds and limits that apply to the family as a whole. Cost-sharing can also vary by the type of care you receive. For instance, inpatient hospital care may be subject to a different set of cost-sharing rules than outpatient care.

Another important factor is whether your health care provider has a contract with your insurance company. Providers who have such a contract are called in-network providers. Those who do not are called out-of-network providers. Some insurance plans further divide in-network providers into tiers.

Providers in Tier 1 are the most preferred by the insurance plan, often because they agreed to provide services at relatively lower prices. Other in-network providers may be placed in Tier 2. Costs to you tend to be lowest for services from Tier 1 providers, higher for services from Tier 2 providers and highest for services from out-of-network providers. Some insurance plans may not cover out-of-network care at all.

There are often trade-offs between these elements – low premiums look great on the face of it, but any money you save by paying lower premiums is often offset by significant out-of-pocket costs, limited options for in-network providers, or both.

The problem, of course, is that it's impossible to predict how much health care you might need. If you could somehow know you weren't going to need much health care in the following year, then a low-premium, high-deductible plan would make sense.

If, on the other hand, you knew you were going to receive a catastrophic diagnosis or be in a life-altering car accident, you would want to opt for a plan that might include higher premiums but lower copays.

Gambles and trade-offs

If everyone knew all the medical care they needed could be provided by any general doctor, they might not care much about what or who was in-network. But if they knew they were going to need specialist surgery for a rare type of tumor, for example, offered at only one center out of state, they would want to consider what counts as in-network – or the costs of going out of network – in substantially more detail.

In many other countries, people don't face the same burden. In nations with universal health coverage, understanding health insurance jargon isn't a matter of financial survival. Because coverage is guaranteed, people do not have to agonize every year over choosing a health plan based on countless variables.

But until meaningful change comes about in the U.S., the best many Americans can do is understand health insurance jargon so they can choose plans that work best for them.

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Silicone wristbands can help scientists track people's exposure to pollutants like 'forever chemicals'

By YAW EDU ESSANDOH
Ph.D. Student in Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University (The Conversation)

Every morning, people fasten their watch, slip on a bracelet and head out the door without thinking much about what they might encounter along the way. The air they breathe, the dust on their hands and the surfaces they touch all feel ordinary. Yet many chemical exposures happen quietly, without smell, taste or warning.

What if something as simple as a silicone band around your wrist could help track those invisible exposures?

Environmental monitoring has traditionally relied on snapshots of exposure from a water sample collected on a single day, a blood sample drawn at one point in time, or soil tested from a specific location. But exposure unfolds gradually as people move through different environments and come into contact with air, dust and surfaces throughout the day.

New noninvasive monitoring tools aim to capture that longer-term picture.

As synthetic chemicals such as "forever chemicals," known as perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), become more widespread in everyday environments, scientists are increasingly focused on understanding how exposure to these substances occurs in daily life.

Traditional monitoring misses everyday reality

Traditional monitoring methods are essential for identifying contamination, but they capture exposure as a moment rather than something that unfolds over time.

In studies involving people, measuring exposure often requires invasive procedures such as blood draws, which can be expensive, logistically challenging and, for some participants, uncomfortable enough to discourage involvement.

Early in my environmental chemistry research, I noticed something that didn't quite add up. People living in the same agricultural community, or animals sharing the same landscape, often showed very different chemical profiles even when environmental measurements looked similar. The surroundings hadn't changed much; daily behavior had.

Movement through different spaces, time spent indoors or outdoors, contact with treated surfaces and interactions with consumer products all shape exposure in ways a single sample can't fully capture. That realization raised a larger question: If exposure unfolds gradually, how can scientists measure it using tools designed for specific moments? Answering that question requires a shift away from isolated measurements and toward approaches that reflect lived experience.

What noninvasive tools change

That question led me to work with passive, noninvasive monitoring tools, including silicone wristbands. Rather than actively collecting samples, these tools absorb chemicals from the surrounding environment over time, similar to how skin or fur interacts with air, dust and surfaces.

Silicone wristbands work because they are made of a silicone polymer called polydimethylsiloxane, or PDMS, that can absorb many organic chemicals from the surrounding environment. As the band is worn, compounds from air, dust and surfaces gradually diffuse into the silicone over time.

The material acts somewhat like a sponge, passively collecting traces of chemicals the wearer encounters during daily activities. After the wristband is worn for several days or weeks, researchers can extract those compounds in the laboratory and analyze them to better understand patterns of exposure.

Silicone wristbands are one example of a broader group of passive, noninvasive monitoring tools designed to observe how chemicals accumulate over time. Other approaches, including passive air samplers placed in homes or small wearable devices, follow similar principles by absorbing compounds from the surrounding environment.

Researchers have used noninvasive tools in community studies to track exposure without medical procedures, lowering barriers to participation and reducing the burden on volunteers. For example, scientists have applied these approaches to study exposure among adolescent girls in agricultural communities, firefighters and occupants in office buildings.

Researchers have also adapted similar ideas for animal and wildlife studies. Instead of drawing blood, scientists may use wearable tags, collars or passive samplers placed in an animal's environment, such as nesting areas or habitats, to understand how chemicals accumulate over time. These approaches can offer insight into exposure across different ecosystems while minimizing stress on animals.

Like any method, passive monitoring has limitations. Some chemicals are more difficult to capture than others, and environmental conditions such as temperature, sunlight or airflow can influence how efficiently samplers absorb pollutants. Wearable devices also reflect exposure over a specific period, meaning they cannot provide a complete lifetime record.

These approaches do not replace traditional monitoring. Instead, they add context, showing how exposure accumulates across time and space rather than appearing suddenly at a single sampling point.

Why this matters now

In the United States, PFAS contamination has become a growing public concern, from drinking water advisories to product restrictions and cleanup efforts. Federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, have highlighted the persistence of these chemicals and their widespread presence in the environment.

Much of the public conversation focuses on where PFAS are found in water systems, soils or consumer products. Understanding exposure, however, also requires attention to how people and ecosystems encounter these chemicals in everyday settings.

Noninvasive monitoring tools may help fill that gap. They offer ways to better understand cumulative exposure, identify overlooked pathways and inform environmental health and conservation decisions. For wildlife, these methods may allow researchers to detect emerging risks earlier without adding pressure to species already facing habitat loss and climate stress.

Although these approaches are becoming more common in environmental health research, they are still emerging compared with traditional sampling methods. Costs, the need for standardized protocols and differences in how various chemicals interact with passive materials can slow wider adoption.

As researchers continue refining these tools, they can complement rather than replace established monitoring strategies.

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FINANCE

Tero Vesalainen / Dreamstime / TNS

Americans age 60 and older lose more than $28 billion annually to financial exploitation.

Banks are becoming bulwarks against scams for vulnerable seniors

By PAULA SPAN
KFF Health News (TNS)

The first call came just before Thanksgiving last year. She didn't recognize the phone number, but she answered anyway.

"The person said he was an officer of the Department of Criminal Investigations looking into drug trafficking and money laundering," the woman recalled. He seemed to know a lot about her: the states where she and her late husband had lived; his name and occupation; and her current address in Washington County, Rhode Island.

On her phone, he showed her a convincing badge and a photo ID with his name ("'Frank' something"), plus an article describing the supposed investigation. The woman, a 76-year-old retiree, denied any involvement.

"You can hire a very expensive criminal defense attorney, or you can cooperate with me," Frank told her.

"Now, when you think about it, it doesn't make any sense," the woman acknowledged recently. But persuaded by the badge and ID, she agreed to cooperate. Otherwise, "I thought they were going to come and arrest me."

Frank called each morning to learn where she was going, what she was doing. His team would be watching, he warned. The woman, feeling "petrified," started looking around as she drove to garden club meetings. Was somebody following her?

It was all a scam.

Because victims' sense of shame often leaves them reluctant to report such crimes, the extent of elder financial exploitation is hard to calculate. The Federal Trade Commission reported losses of $2.4 billion in 2024, largely driven by investment and romance scams and impersonations, with total losses much higher.

Americans age 60 and older lose more than $28 billion annually to financial exploitation, AARP estimated in 2023.

As those numbers rise, because the population is aging and predators are growing increasingly resourceful, banks and investment firms are becoming the first line of defense.

Frank's initial target: her account at Fidelity Investments. He instructed her to shift about $250,000 into her checking account, telling the financial adviser at her local office that she and her family intended to buy real estate.

That scheme fizzled when the adviser said Fidelity could not approve the transaction without more information on the property.

So Frank sent her to her local branch of Washington Trust Company to take $70,000 in cash from a home-equity line of credit. "We don't give out that much in cash," the teller said, quietly messaging the branch manager, who had known the woman and her husband for years.

The manager ushered the woman into her office to talk, and the scam stopped there, with a call to the local police. The woman's assets remained intact, but the experience proved so mortifying that she has not told even her family how close she came to losing much of her life savings. The New York Times is withholding her name to spare her embarrassment.

"I felt so stupid," she said. "I felt like a fool."

Financial predators targeting older adults represent "a heightened focus for us now," said Mary Noons, president and chief operating officer of Washington Trust.

A regional community bank, Washington Trust cranked up its efforts last fall to advise older customers and their families about finances, including the dangers of elder fraud and exploitation. It published and distributed a booklet called "Age With Wisdom" and brought in an expert on dementia to speak with staff members.

And it became one of the 1,500 financial institutions to date to use BankSafe, a free AARP video program that trains front-line employees to spot the red flags indicating possible elder exploitation and to intervene. Everyone at the branch where the 76-year-old banked had taken the training.

"Some older customers visit their bank far more frequently than they see their health care providers," Noons pointed out.

Until recent years, financial institutions placed "more of an emphasis on the autonomy of the client," said Pamela Teaster, director of the Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology and an elder abuse researcher. Their approach was, "an adult has the capacity to make poor choices, and we're going to let them make them," she added.

But changes in government and industry policies and practices have encouraged greater vigilance. Congress passed the Senior Safe Act in 2018, protecting banks and financial firms from liability if they reported suspected exploitation to authorities.

That year, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority began requiring member firms to ask for a trusted contact person when investors open or update accounts. (The account holder isn't obliged to provide one, however.) And since 2022, it has allowed firms to place holds on older investors' transactions if they suspect exploitation is involved.

About half of states have enacted laws that permit financial institutions to deny suspicious transactions or impose holds for specified periods to allow investigations, said Jilenne Gunther, the director of BankSafe.

"It adds friction," she explained. "With space and time, the criminal gets worried and might move on. And the potential mark has time to stop and think."

Teaster's analysis of data from BankSafe, during a six-month pilot in 82 financial institutions, found that participants were much more likely to report suspected cases and save customers money than a control group was.

Not all of older adults' losses result from predators, however. They can, on their own, get caught up in investment fads, take on too much debt, or make otherwise unwise decisions, even without criminals pulling the strings or relatives looting their accounts.

Managing finances presents complex cognitive challenges, said Mark Lachs, co-chief of geriatrics and palliative medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine. "It requires a lot of brain," he said, including: "Memory, remembering that a bill is due. Executive function, the ability to manage your time. Abstraction, hypothesizing about your future."

He added, "Financial errors are not infrequently the first sign of impending dementia or a neurocognitive disorder."

A 2024 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, for instance, found an increased probability of delinquent payments and deteriorating credit ratings in the five years before a dementia diagnosis. Those errors can reduce seniors' access to credit and raise their interest rates on loans at the very point when caregiving expenses are likely to soar.

Lachs has called on fellow doctors to recognize what he calls Age-Associated Financial Vulnerability, a syndrome that can affect even older people with normal cognition, especially if they contend with medical illnesses, sensory deficits, or social isolation.

And he remains skeptical about the financial industry's claims of heightened attention to its oldest customers. "I still see concerning financial transactions executed that should have received far greater scrutiny," he said.

Training more front-line staff members and increasing emphasis on establishing trusted contacts for older customers would help, Gunther said, because "once the money leaves the account, it's near impossible to ever retrieve it." More states could enact laws allowing financial institutions to deny suspicious transactions or impose holds.

Several related bills with bipartisan support are working their way through Congress. The National Strategy for Combating Scams Act would require the FBI to coordinate efforts to protect seniors. A bill that restores an IRS deduction would at least provide the consolation of excusing scam victims from paying taxes on money they no longer have.

However, new weapons like artificial-intelligence voice cloning – in which the supposed grandson four states away who urgently needs $5,000 in gift cards actually sounds like the victim's grandson – keep advocates and bankers awake at night.

In the Washington Trust branch where the Rhode Island woman didn't lose her money, employees just days earlier had stopped a scam similar to the one that had targeted her.

But more recently, nobody spotted any danger signs when an older woman withdrew $9,000 for a kitchen renovation, until it went to a scammer instead of a contractor.

KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.

Keep in mind that the mortgage amount you're preapproved for does not factor in cost-of-living. That means major costs like transportation, healthcare, childcare and more need to be accounted for when determining how much house you can afford.
Dreamstime / TNS

10 first-time homebuyer mistakes to avoid

By ANDREW DEHAN
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Buying your first home can be thrilling, but it can also be stressful. After all, it's likely one of the most impactful financial decisions you'll make.

Keeping yourself informed can make the experience of getting a mortgage much smoother – so before you get started, consider this list of major mistakes to avoid when buying your first home.

COMMON MISTAKES WHEN BUYING YOUR FIRST HOME

1. Not shopping around for mortgage lenders

You're not going to get the same mortgage rate and fees everywhere. Comparing different mortgage offers is the best way to get a good deal on your interest rate and closing costs.

"Talking to [just] one lender is like walking into a car dealership and willingly paying the sticker price – never a great idea," says Mark Hamrick, senior economic analyst for Bankrate. "Mortgage pricing varies a lot, even for the same borrower. Getting multiple rate quotes is one of the easiest ways to lower your payment. It also can provide peace of mind, knowing that you've done your best to reduce costs."

Comparison-shopping could save you big money: A fraction of a difference on your mortgage rate could mean tens of thousands of dollars in interest over the course of a 30-year loan. You'll also want to pay attention to the upfront fees each lender charges.

2. House hunting before getting preapproved for a mortgage

It's easy to want to hop to the fun part of shopping for a home, but it's important to have your finances in order first. So, before you go to any open houses, get preapproved with a mortgage lender. That way, you'll have a solid idea of how much you can really afford – and when you find a home you want to buy, you can put in a solid offer.

Preapproval requires a credit check, and you'll need to submit documentation proving your income, assets and debts (like bank statements, pay stubs and tax returns). Not only does preapproval give your offer legs, but it's good practice for applying for a mortgage formally when your offer is accepted.

When you get preapproved, you might also consider locking in your interest rate. Doing so will help you get a handle on costs and lessen any concerns about rising rates when you do make an offer.

3. Assuming you need a 20 percent down payment

The long-held belief that buyers must put down a full 20 percent of the home price is a myth. While a 20 percent down payment does help you avoid having to pay for mortgage insurance, many buyers today don't want to (or can't) put down that much money, and most loan products won't require you to.

The amount that will work best for you depends on which loan type you choose, and also on your credit score, your rate and how long you plan to stay in the home. Conventional loans and FHA loans are the most common for first-time homebuyers. If you qualify, conventional loans can require as little as 3 percent down and FHA loan requirements can be as low as 3.5 percent.

In 2025, the typical down payment on a home for first-time buyers was 10 percent, according to data from the National Association of Realtors. Some properties, like co-ops or condos, could still require a larger down payment, so check with your real estate agent about specific requirements and budget accordingly.

4. Trying to time the market

Trying to time either the housing market or the mortgage market can be a bit of a fools' errand. Ideally, you don't want to buy at the top of the market, but you need to make the move when it makes sense for you logically, not necessarily when all of the economic stars align.

"Mortgage rates move on economic data, on Federal Reserve expectations and on any given financial headline – these are all things we can't control," says Hamrick. "Fortunately, we can control the following: our credit score, paying our bills on time, managing our borrowing, the amount of the down payment and shopping around for a loan."

5. Making decisions based on emotion

Shopping for your first home can come with a lot of feelings. You start to imagine your future there, perhaps raising a family there, daydreaming about how you can make a space your own. It's only natural to have high hopes and dreams – the key is to avoid letting those feelings deter you from being practical when it comes to your budget and long-term goals.

"Emotional purchases rarely work out well," says Ken Johnson, Walker Family Chair of Real Estate at the University of Mississippi. "Keep in mind that this is your first home. That mostly means it's designed to get you in the homeownership game."

Especially as a first-time buyer, you have to balance the high emotions of homebuying with the financial fundamentals. Otherwise, it's easy to get in over your head.

6. Buying more house than you can afford

Stretching your budget thin to buy a home you fall in love with is another mistake to avoid. With high home prices and mortgage rates, it's especially important for first-time buyers not to overextend themselves.

"If the specific monthly mortgage payment makes you uncomfortable on closing day, it'll hurt a lot more down the line, when the total cost of ownership literally hits close to home," says Hamrick. "Repairs, renovations, insurance and property taxes all add up."

Owning a home costs over $21,000 a year in "hidden" expenses, according to a 2025 Bankrate study.

Keep in mind that the mortgage amount you're preapproved for does not factor in cost-of-living. That means major costs like transportation, healthcare, childcare and more need to be accounted for when determining how much house you can afford.

"As the saying goes, date the rate, marry the house," says Hamrick. "If rates improve later, refinancing can be an option down the road. Overbuying is harder, and nearly impossible to fix."

7. Making other big purchases before you close

It's natural to want to start making purchases for your new home once you go into contract. But pump the brakes, says Melissa Cohn, regional vice president for William Raveis Mortgage.

"When you buy a new home, many people need to buy furniture or other big-ticket items," Cohn says. "Even though we tell our clients not to apply for new credit or increase their debt prior to closing, many people will make these large purchases prior to the closing. This new debt can cause your debt-to-income [ratio] to rise above the maximum percentage allowed – and that can cause you to get turned down and have no place to put your new purchases."

Even if your new debt doesn't cause the loan to fall through altogether, it can have other ramifications, says Johnson. New debt can slow down the loan process, lower the amount you qualify for and potentially cause your interest rate to rise.

"There is nothing good that can come from adding debt during a real estate deal," he says. Wait until the deal is done before you make those purchases.

8. Not researching your loan options

There are a variety of loan options available to first-time homebuyers that aren't always talked about by loan officers or real estate agents.

"Some buyers will just rely on the advice of their real estate agent or the first mortgage banker they speak to. That may not always be the best advice," says Cohn.

For example, if your credit isn't stellar, you might have trouble qualifying for a conventional loan. For those whose credit score would disqualify them from a conventional loan, an FHA loan – which has lower minimum score requirements – is often a viable alternative.

However, says Cohn, a lot of banks or brokers will promote FHA loans to first-time buyers when perhaps another type would be a better option.

"FHA loans have high upfront closing costs, and the slightly lower rate does not properly compensate for the upfront fees, especially if you think rates will come down this year and you will want to refinance," she says.

Other options can include VA loans, which are available to eligible active-duty and veteran military service members and their spouses, and USDA loans, which help moderate- to low-income borrowers buy homes in certain rural areas.

Which choice is best for you all depends on what your finances look like and what you qualify for.

9. Failing to maintain a rainy-day fund

A common mistake first-time homebuyers make is draining their savings to cover closing costs or put down the largest possible down payment. While this could help you get a lower rate or pay less in fees, it also puts you at risk.

Homeowners have to be prepared for the costs of maintenance, repairs and emergencies. For instance, if you move in and, two months later, your furnace gives out, you need to have funds available to pay for the repair. Having a cash cushion or emergency fund readily available is crucial – you never know when you're going to need it.

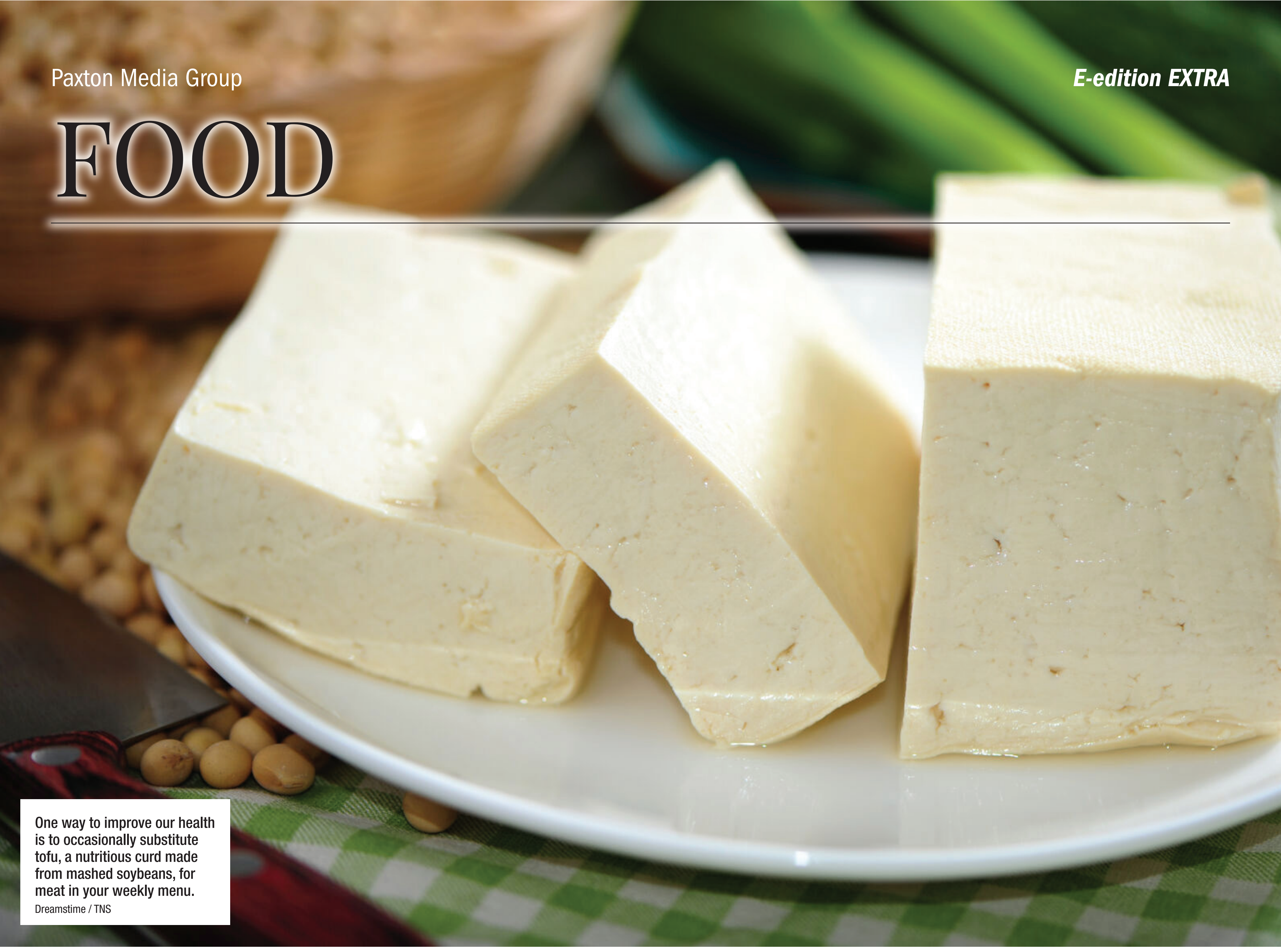
Also, being "house poor," with all your money tied up in your home, can crowd out other opportunities, such as funding a retirement account, starting a family or saving for a vacation.

10. Missing out on assistance programs

Before you buy a home, make sure you explore first-time homebuyer programs to see if you qualify for any assistance. These types of programs are generally offered at the state and local levels, but lenders sometimes offer discounts for first-timers, too. Each state operates a housing finance authority offering programs that provide down payment and closing cost assistance to buyers who qualify, and the requirements can vary widely.

Applying for assistance can slow down the purchase process, so some loan officers and real estate agents may discourage you from doing so. However, remember that this is your money and your decision. If you don't seek out assistance, you could be leaving free money on the table.

Visit Bankrate online at bankrate.com.



One way to improve our health is to occasionally substitute tofu, a nutritious curd made from mashed soybeans, for meat in your weekly menu.
Dreamstime / TNS

3 Protein-Rich Tofu Recipes Are Highly Nutritious – And Easy to Prepare

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

Are you looking to eat more protein? You're in good company.

According to a 2025 International Food Information Council study, 70 percent of Americans say they want to consume more of the macronutrient that builds and repairs tissue, skin and hair. Which explains why so many labels on grocery store shelves these days – everything from breakfast cereal to snacks to beverages – boast about how many grams of protein are in each serving.

Generally speaking, most adults need 0.36 grams of protein per pound of body weight a day.

But we all also need to eat more plants to improve our health. One way to do both is to occasionally substitute tofu, a nutritious curd made from mashed soybeans, for meat in your weekly menu.

A low-fat, heart-healthy protein that's also cholesterol free, tofu is low-calorie, high in minerals and vitamins and because it has a mild, neutral taste – some say bland – it's highly versatile as an ingredient. It will soak up whatever flavors you marinate or cook it in, making it perfect for both entrees and desserts.

Typically found on refrigerated shelves in the produce section, tofu also is an economical ingredient. A 1-pound block of tofu also is nearly half the price of beef or chicken.

Below, we offer three easy recipes using either firm or silken (soft) tofu that demonstrate just how easy – and tasty – it is to cook with the plant-based protein.

ABOVE: This quick and easy tofu stir-fry features colorful vegetables and a spicy chili garlic sauce.
RIGHT: Chocolate tofu pie, with a graham cracker crust.
Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS

Stir-fried Tofu with Crispy Garlic Chili

Serves 4

Tofu is a staple in many Asian cultures' diets. Here, it is fried with aromatics and crunchy garlic with chili oil and then tossed in lime juice. It's served over your favorite rice.

1 14-ounce block extra-firm tofu, drained and pressed
3 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
12 ounces baby bella or button white mushrooms, stems trimmed, cut into thick slices
3 celery stalks, thinly sliced on a diagonal
2-inch piece ginger, peeled, thinly sliced
1 jalapeño chile, thinly sliced
2 green onions, sliced on the diagonal
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon crunchy garlic with chili oil, or more to taste
1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
Juice of 1 lime
Handful coarsely chopped cilantro
4 cups cooked short-grain or brown rice, for serving

Cut block of tofu into thirds crosswise, then cut each piece crosswise again, and then into 1/2 -inch pieces. Pat dry with paper towels.

Heat 2 tablespoons vegetable oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. When oil is shimmering and easily slides across surface of pan, carefully add tofu in a single layer and cook, undisturbed, until golden brown underneath, about 4-5 minutes.

Flip each piece over and continue to cook until browned on second side, another 4 minutes. Transfer tofu to a plate, leaving oil in pan.

Pour remaining 1 tablespoon vegetable oil into skillet and heat over medium-high until shimmering.

Add mushrooms to pan and cook, undisturbed, until crisp around the edges and browned underneath, about 5 minutes. Give mushrooms a toss and continue to cook, tossing often, until browned and crispy in most spots, about 4 minutes longer.

Add fried tofu, celery, ginger, chile, green onion, soy sauce, crunchy garlic and sesame oil to pan. Cook, tossing often, until celery is crisp-tender, about 3 minutes.

Remove from heat and add lime juice. Scatter cilantro over and toss once more.

Serve over or alongside cooked brown or white rice.

Adapted from bonappetit.com

Crispy Fried Tofu Sandwich

This recipe takes a minute, since you have to first freeze the blocks of tofu, and then thaw them in the refrigerator – a process that makes it denser and spongier and better able to hold its shape when fried. The tiny holes that form when the ice crystals thaw allow the tofu to absorb and store more flavor.

I used sliders buns instead of traditional hamburger buns for a better tofu-to-bread ratio. My favorite hot sauce is New Jersey-made Hank Sauce but Frank's Red Hot would add a great kick of spice, too.

1 (14-ounce) package extra-firm tofu, drained
1 1/2 cups dill pickle juice
1 tablespoon hot sauce, plus more for serving
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1/3 cup all-purpose flour (about 1 1/2 ounces)
1/4 cup cornstarch
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper
Neutral oil (such as canola), for frying
Toasted hamburger buns, for serving
Spicy mayonnaise, for serving
Pickles, for serving
Shredded green cabbage, for serving

Cut tofu slab in half horizontally. Cut each piece in half crosswise to make 4 (2 1/4 – by 3 1/4 – by 3/4 -inch) slabs. Place tofu slabs in an even layer in an airtight container. Cover and freeze 12 hours. Transfer tofu to refrigerator, and let thaw 12 hours.

Wrap tofu slabs in a clean kitchen towel, and press down on tofu to remove any excess liquid. Pour pickle juice into a shallow dish. Add tofu slabs, and let soak 10 minutes, flipping tofu slabs once after 5 minutes.

Stir together hot sauce and mustard in a small bowl; set aside. Stir together flour, cornstarch, black pepper, salt, paprika, garlic powder, and crushed red pepper in a separate shallow bowl.

Pour oil into a large, heavy skillet to a depth of 1/4 inch; heat oil over medium-high until oil is gently rippling or reaches 350 degrees.

Remove tofu from pickle juice, and pat dry; discard pickle juice. Working with 1 tofu slab at a time, dredge tofu in flour mixture, gently pressing to adhere. Tap tofu against bowl to shake off excess; transfer to a plate.

Working with 1 floured tofu slab at a time, lightly brush hot sauce mixture all over tofu. Re-dredge tofu in flour mixture, gently pressing to adhere. Tap tofu against bowl to shake off excess; transfer to a plate.

Carefully add tofu slabs to hot oil; fry until crispy and golden brown, 5-7 minutes, using tongs to flip tofu halfway through cook time.

Remove fried tofu from skillet, and place on a wire rack set inside a rimmed baking sheet. Immediately sprinkle tofu with salt to taste.

Serve tofu on hamburger buns with spicy mayonnaise, pickles, cabbage, and hot sauce.

foodandwine.com

Tofu Chocolate Mousse

The mousse in this velvety, chocolately dessert was a little too soft to cut into firm wedges – maybe because I couldn't wait to sample it before it was done chilling? – but no worries, I simply spooned it into custard cups. Whipped cream enhances its richness.

FOR CRUST:
1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs (about 12 full sheet graham crackers)
1/4 cup granulated sugar
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
FOR FILLING:
3/4 cup sugar
1 pound silken tofu
8 ounces semisweet chocolate, melted
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoons ground cinnamon
Generous pinch chili powder
1/8 teaspoon salt
Whipped cream, for topping

Prepare crust: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Pulse graham cracker crumbs, butter, sugar and salt in a food processor until combined.

Firmly press crumb mixture into bottom and up sides of a 9-inch pie dish. Bake until crust is fragrant and edges are golden, 12-14 minutes. Let cool completely on a wire rack.

Prepare filling: Place sugar in a sauce pot with 3/4 cup water and bring to a boil. Cook until sugar is dissolved, stirring occasionally, then allow to cool slightly.

Place tofu, melted chocolate, vanilla, cinnamon, chili powder, cooled sugar water and salt in a blender. Purée until completely smooth, scraping down the sides as needed.

Pour mixture into the cooled crust, and spread until smooth. Chill until firm, with a piece of plastic on top to prevent a skin from forming.

Once filling has set, spread or pipe whipped cream on top. Serve in wedges or bowls.

Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette

Woodstock survivors

What musicians remain from the 1969 festival

By SCOTT MERVIS
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

Tucker Ransom / Getty Images / TNS

Mexican-born American musician Carlos Santana, right, and American bassist David Brown perform with the other members of Santana at 'Woodstock,' a large rock and roll music concert, Bethel, New York, Aug. 16, 1969.

Country Joe McDonald had one of the most iconic moments at Woodstock – or any music festival, for that matter – leading the sea of hippies in the Vietnam protest cheer "And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for?!"

On March 7, the country-psych legend became the latest Woodstock alum to pass away, at the age of 84.

He follows Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead, who died in January at 78. One of the most prolific and enduring musicians of his generation, Weir was a mere 21 years old when he took the stage at the historic gathering of nearly half a million people in Bethel, New York, in August 1969.

And he wasn't even the youngest: That distinction belonged to a member of Sha Na Na. Yes, Sha Na Na was there.

Two of the festival's biggest stars – Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin – were dead in just a little over a year. Others, like John Fogerty and Neil Young, are still energizing crowds today, both having reached 80.

Of the five female or female-fronted acts, Joan Baez – prominently depicted in the recent Bob Dylan biopic "A Complete Unknown" – is the only one still active.

Woodstock featured 32 acts with more than 150 musicians onstage over its four days. More than five decades later, a little over 80 of those performers are still around to say they were there – in the rain, the mud and the madness – for the "3 Days of Peace and Music" that turned into four (Aug. 15-18).

Here is the lineup, in order, with the surviving musicians from the acts listed.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY

Richie Havens

Flown in by helicopter, the coffeehouse performer and his backing musicians were heroic when thrust into action to unexpectedly open the show, most notably with the improvised "Freedom." Havens died in 2013 at 72.

LIVING: Paul "Deano" Williams (guitar), Daniel Ben Zebulon (percussion).

Sweetwater

The Los Angeles group – a fusion of folk, rock and jazz, with flute, cello, conga, keyboards and drums (no guitar) – was scheduled to open the festival Friday afternoon but was caught up in traffic, leaving Havens to buy time while they arrived by helicopter. Four months after Woodstock, in December 1969, Nancy Nevins was rear-ended on a California freeway and badly wounded, damaging her vocal cords and effectively ending her singing career. The group disbanded in 1971.

LIVING: Nancy Nevins (vocals/guitar), Elpidio Cobian (congas), Alex Del Zoppo (keyboards), Fred Herrera (bass).

Bert Sommer

The singer-songwriter from The Left Banke was a hit at Woodstock and had a few years of success as a musician and actor before dying in 1990 at 41.

LIVING: Ira Stone (guitar, organ, harmonica).

UNKNOWN: Charlie Bilello (bass).

Ravi Shankar

The sitar virtuoso did a 45-minute set of classical Indian raga and went on to a prolific career that included touring with George Harrison. He died in 2012 at 92.

LIVING: Maya Kulkarni (tamboura).

Melanie

The quirky folk-pop singer who went on solo, acoustic and unscheduled at 1 a.m. drew two encores. She had a No. 1 hit two years later with "Brand New Key." She died in 2024 at 76.

Arlo Guthrie

With "Coming Into Los Angeles," a Dylan cover and a 10-minute comic monologue, Woody's son was a Woodstock hit despite him being in a less-than-lucid state, per bethelwoodscenter.org. The 78-year-old ceased touring after suffering a stroke in 2019 but came out of retirement in 2023, when he last performed.

LIVING: Arlo Guthrie and bassist Bob Arkin.

Joan Baez

Baez was six months pregnant when she closed the first night beginning at 3 a.m. The 85-year-old performed at the star-studded tribute concert for Bob Weir in San Francisco on Jan. 17 and appeared at No Kings protests in the fall.

LIVING: Joan Baez, Richard Festinger (guitar), Jeffrey Shurtleff (vocals, guitar).

SATURDAY-SUNDAY

Quill

The Boston rock band – one of three Woodstock acts without an album (along with Santana and Sha Na Na) – opened the Saturday slate at noon with a set that did not win over the crowd. The band broke up in 1970 after releasing one album. Roger North became a noted instrument designer and inventor.

Living: Roger North, Dan Cole (vocals), Phil Thayer (keyboards).

Country Joe McDonald

Before taking the stage with The Fish, he was rushed out for a half-hour solo set while Santana got ready.

Santana

Carlos Santana, just 21 and hallucinating on mescaline, led the virtually unknown Latin rock band in a sizzling Saturday afternoon set. At 78, he is still touring and was joined for a set by Michael Carabello in 2024. Keyboardist Gregg Rolie, 78, went on to co-found Journey and tours as part of Ringo's All-Starr Band.

LIVING: Carlos Santana, Gregg Rolie, Michael Shrieve (drums), Michael Carabello and José "Chepito" Areas (percussion).

John Sebastian

The Lovin' Spoonful frontman, who was spotted in the crowd and thrust onto the Woodstock stage unbilled, while tripping (!), performed at Bethel Woods Center for the Arts in December.

Keef Hartley Band

For its first American date, this horn-driven British blues-rock band, led by the former Bluesbreakers drummer, had the misfortune of following Santana on Saturday afternoon, combined with the misfortune of not being filmed. The band lasted until 1972. While Hartley died in 2011 at 67, several other members remain active.

LIVING: Miller Anderson (guitar, vocals), Jimmy Jewell (saxophone), Henry Lowther (trumpet, violin).

Incredible String Band

The Scottish psych-folk band, which refused to play day one in the rain, has the most mysterious Woodstock alum in Christina "Licorice" McKechnie. She left the band in 1972, embraced Scientology and was last heard from in 1990. Her former husband told the Telegraph UK last year, "She literally made a conscious decision to become homeless … she just loved being homeless." There was a tribute to the band in London in the fall.

LIVING: Rose Simpson (vocals, multi-instrumental), Robin Williamson (vocals, multi-instrumental), Mike Heron (multi-instrumental).

UNKNOWN: Christina "Licorice" McKechnie (vocals)

Canned Heat

The L.A. band took the stage Saturday evening with Bob "The Bear" Hite informing the audience that "we're just gonna play a little blues!" What followed was a hot, crowd-pleasing set. Guitarist-singer Alan "Blind Owl" Wilson was the first Woodstock alum to die, in September 1970. Hite, the co-lead vocalist, died in 1981. Adolfo "Fito" de la Parra continues to lead a touring version of Canned Heat.

LIVING: Adolfo "Fito" de la Parra (drums), Harvey "The Snake" Mandel (guitar).

Mountain

Like Creedence Clearwater Revival, people didn't associate Mountain with Woodstock because there was no footage in the documentary, despite it giving a rousing Saturday night set. Six months later, the band released its signature hit "Mississippi Queen" and then broke up in '72, reunited in '74 and disbanded in '75. Following the death of frontman Leslie West in December 2020, Laing became the last surviving member of Mountain's classic lineup. He leads Corky Laing's Mountain.

LIVING: Corky Laing (drums).

Grateful Dead

The Dead, which played a chaotic, rain-soaked late Saturday night set – that Fogerty claimed "put the crowd to sleep" – flourished until the death of Jerry Garcia in 1995. Bill Kreutzmann, 79 and the last surviving member of the original band, left Dead & Company in 2023, while Mickey Hart, 82, was a member up until its last show in August.

LIVING: Mickey Hart (drums), Bill Kreutzmann (drums).

Creedence Clearwater Revival

John Fogerty was so displeased with the band's set – many felt otherwise – that he did not allow the footage in the film. The band split in 1972, creating a mess of legal challenges. Fogerty is on tour this summer.

LIVING: John Fogerty, Stu Cook, Doug Clifford.

Janis Joplin and the Kozmic Blues Band

Also missing from the film was this fiery but uneven 2:30 a.m. Sunday set by Joplin, who was struggling with addiction, with her new band. Trumpeter Luis Gasca went on to a long career in Latin jazz.

LIVING: Luis Gasca and Terry Clements (saxophone).

Sly & the Family Stone

The soul-rock pioneers from San Francisco took the crowd "Higher" in the wee hours of Sunday morning with one of the most acclaimed sets of the festival. Sly Stone, who was mostly inactive past the '70s, died in June at 82. Jerry Martini, 83, leads the group The Family Stone with Sly's daughter.

LIVING: Jerry Martini, Freddie Stone (guitar), Rose Stone (vocals, piano), Larry Graham (bass), Greg Errico (drums).

The Who

The Who, the lone British Invasion band at Woodstock, went on at 5 a.m. Saturday and devoted the bulk of its set to "Tommy." The two principals wrapped up what was presumed to be the band's retirement tour in October.

LIVING: Roger Daltrey (vocals), Pete Townshend (guitar).

Jefferson Airplane

Grace Slick, who greeted the Sunday morning crowd at Woodstock with "Good morning, people ... It's the new dawn," retired in 1990. Jorma Kaukonen and Jack Casady are still active as Hot Tuna.

LIVING: Grace Slick (vocals), Jorma Kaukonen (guitar), Jack Casady (bass).

SUNDAY-MONDAY

Joe Cocker and the Grease Band

Joe Cocker opened the Sunday afternoon slate at 2 p.m., stepping off a helicopter and onto the stage where the Grease Band had already started. He slowly won over the crowd and delivered one of the ultimate Woodstock performances with the Beatles' "With a Little Help From My Friends." Cocker died in 2014 at 70. Neil Hubbard went on to play with Roxy Music. Chris Stainton is still touring as an Eric Clapton band member.

LIVING: Chris Stainton (keyboards), Neil Hubbard (guitar).

Country Joe and the Fish

Country Joe was a solo hit on Saturday and then returned with his Berkeley, California, psych-rock protest band at 6:30 p.m. Sunday after a nearly three-hour rain delay. Barry "The Fish" Melton still performs blues and rock shows while also maintaining a second career as a public defender in California. McDonald died of complications from Parkinson's disease.

LIVING: Barry Melton (guitar), Mark Kapner (keyboards), Doug Metzner (bass), Greg "Duke" Dewey (drums).

Ten Years After

The British blues-rock band toughed it out through the rain and technical issues on Sunday night, delivering the memorable "I'm Going Home." The band first split in 1974, and frontman Alvin Lee died in 2013 at 68. Ric Lee (no relation to Alvin), 80, still leads a version of Ten Years After.

LIVING: Ric Lee (drums), Chick Churchill (keyboards), Leo Lyons (bass).

The Band

With the passing of Garth Hudson in 2024, there are no surviving members of the group that was based right there in Woodstock. There was buzz around the performance that Bob Dylan might show up, so there was some disappointment within the crowd despite it being a strong set of songs from the debut album. Nonetheless, The Band chose not to be part of the film, thinking the performance was not "up to snuff."

Johnny Winter

With the clock ticking past midnight, the quartet played an electrifying blues-rock set, also not included in the film. Edgar Winter, who went on to a solo career the year after Woodstock, was just seen jamming with Billy Strings in Nashville in February. Tommy Shannon went on to become the bassist for Stevie Vaughan's Double Trouble and is still active.

LIVING: Edgar Winter (keyboards), Tommy Shannon (bass).

Blood, Sweat & Tears

The jazz-rock group went on at 1:45 a.m. Monday and struggled with the horns in the mix, while ending strong with "When I Die" and "You've Made Me So Very Happy." Its brief mainstream success ended with the departure of David Clayton-Thomas in 1972. Guitarist Steve Katz went on to produce the Lou Reed albums "Rock 'n' Roll Animal" and "Sally Can't Dance" and become the VP of Mercury Records. A touring version of Blood, Sweat & Tears continues today, though none of its current members played Woodstock. Clayton-Thomas last performed in 2020, according to setlist.fm.

LIVING: David Clayton-Thomas (vocals, guitar), Steve Katz, Fred Lipsius (alto sax, keyboards), Jim Fielder (bass, guitar), Bobby Colomby (drums, percussion), Chuck Winfield (trumpet, flugelhorn), Jerry Hyman (trombone, recorder).

Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

The supergroup played its second-ever show at Woodstock, having debuted the previous night with Joni Mitchell, who would write the anthem "Woodstock." David Crosby died in 2023 at 81. The other three members remain active – Stephen Stills less so in recent years.

LIVING: Stephen Stills (vocals, guitar), Graham Nash (vocals, keyboards), Neil Young (vocals, guitar).

Paul Butterfield Blues Band

Butterfield and company took the stage with Chicago blues at the ungodly hour of 6 a.m. Monday. It broke up in 1971 after a sixth album, and Butterfield died in 1987 at 44. On stage with him was another future legend, David Sanborn, who died in 2024 at 78. Howard Feiten, 77, patented the Buzz Feiten tuning system and continues recording, teaching and building guitars.

LIVING: Howard Feiten (guitar), Trevor Lawrence (saxophone).

Sha Na Na

Weirdly enough, the most out-of-place group at Woodstock went on Monday morning right before Jimi Hendrix with a '50s revival act that baffled the crowd. They would become the only Woodstock act to have its own prime-time TV show (1977-81). In addition, its former members include a VP at Columbia Pictures (the late Denny Greene), an orthopedic surgeon (Scott Powell), an entertainment lawyer who managed Green Day among others (Elliot Cahn), a linguistic expert (Rob Leonard) and a provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (Alan Cooper). Henry Gross, the youngest musician at Woodstock, at 18, continued with a music career.

LIVING: Rob Leonard, Scott Powell, Alan Cooper, Donald "Donny" York, Richard "Joff" Joffe, Dave Garrett (all, vocals); Henry Gross and Elliot Cahn (guitar); Bruce "Bruno" C. Clarke (bass); Joe Witkin (piano).

Jimi Hendrix Gypsy Sun and Rainbows

This legendary set, scheduled for late Saturday night, didn't get on until 9 a.m. Monday with the crowd dwindled to an estimated 40,000. Hendrix was introducing this new band – following The Jimi Hendrix Experience – that included his military buddy Billy Cox, a bassist from Wheeling, West Virginia, who graduated from Schenley High School in Oakland. Cox, 84, still takes part in the Experience Hendrix tribute tours.

LIVING: Juma Sultan and Gerardo Velez (percussion).

MOVIE REVIEW

Jonathan Olley / Amazon Content Services LLC / TNS

Ryan Gosling stars as Ryland Grace in "Project Hail Mary."

'Project Hail Mary' a sweeping sci-fi epic with a whole lot of heart

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

What if running into an alien while far from home wasn't necessarily terrifying? After decades of "Alien" movies (and their rip-offs) convincing us that deep space alien encounters end with bloody bodily destruction, directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller suggest in their sweeping sci-fi weepie "Project Hail Mary" that there might be a new way to make chests burst – with love.

Friendly aliens aren't a new phenomenon in movies, but usually, those friendships develop on our home turf of Earth. But in adapting Andy Weir's novel to the screen, writer Drew Goddard combines two familiar genres: the "man alone in space" movie with the dog (or cute creature) movie, taking the maxim "who rescued who?" to new, previously unexplored heights.

Our future "man alone in space" is Ryland Grace (Ryan Gosling), an appealingly rumpled middle school science teacher, with a tousled blond mop and cute little glasses always hanging off one ear. In an efficient bit of exposition, he spends a class period explaining to his students (and the audience) that the sun is being eaten by a beam of "astrophage" that will slowly starve Earth over several decades. It's a clever way for the film to quickly get us all up to speed, before Grace is picked up by a group of international feds who'd like to have a word with him.

In charge is Eva Stratt (Sandra Hüller), a stern German tactician who is tasked with assembling a global coalition to handle the astrophage problem. (An international group hellbent on … saving the planet? Please try to suspend your disbelief). She's interested in Grace because of a scandalous dissertation that got him tossed out of academia, and it turns out that he does have some useful ideas. He's swiftly pressed into duty training the astronauts who will be sent on a mission to a far-off star for research and hopefully resolutions.

Yet Grace is the one who wakes up in space, and this story emerges nonlinearly, narrative flashbacks like bursts of memory ripping through his brain, discombobulated after a long intergalactic coma.

'Project Hail Mary'

★★★

MPA rating: PG-13 (for some thematic material and suggestive references)

Running time: 2:36

How to watch: In theaters

He gets his bearings alone in a spaceship that also holds two dead crew members, putting the puzzle together and learning to survive on the ship, overcoming his panic and fear. Forced into bravery alone in space, there's no time or space for self-doubt, only action.

Lord and Miller, known best for their charming and whip-smart animated films like "The Lego Movie" and "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse," emphasize through style that "Project Hail Mary" isn't like other sci-fi epics. Beautifully photographed by Greig Fraser, the color palette is warm and colorful, not cold and sterile; Daniel Pemberton's percussive score is curious, bright and emotionally leading. Most of all, our millennial-coded hero Grace isn't the usual stoic spaceman. He wears funny science tees and talks to himself and to his video logs in one-liners and self-deprecating jokes. He shrieks at a spacewalk. Even his suit is red, setting him visually apart from the sci-fi norm.

Grace is not alone for long. A huge, mysterious, Erector Set-looking ship pulls up alongside his ship and starts hurtling strange messages at him. Soon a tunnel between the ships, then a meeting, with a friendly, inquisitive alien who looks like a sort of craggy spider/crab, whom Grace dubs Rocky. Through dancing, gesture and sound, they start to communicate, but conveniently for us, Grace quickly devises a pattern recognition language system so Rocky can have his own voice (James Ortiz). The pair quickly bond over the fact that they both need to save their respective planets from astrophage, and decide to work together. Adventure, heroics and friendship ensue.

"Project Hail Mary" is an awe-inspiring sci-fi film that wants to make us feel – and feel good – more than it wants to make us ponder our existence. Themes of self-sacrifice dance around the script, but for a film that deals with such dark ideas as isolation and death in space, the film undermines its own pathos at every opportunity. Emotional rug-pulls arrive in the form of happy surprises that stretch the third act too long and test the limits of our disbelief.

That's due to Weir's source material, Goddard's script, Lord and Miller's consistently warm, amusing tone and Gosling's appealing, if obvious, star turn. Hüller's no-nonsense presence is the only astringent element to offset the goofy antics, and even she ultimately delivers an emotional karaoke version of Harry Styles' "Sign of the Times."

Executed with incredible craft and style and a whole lot of heart, "Project Hail Mary" verges on the edge of being too saccharinely sweet. But sci-fi can serve many different purposes for audiences, and maybe that sweetness, combined with a story of cooperation and collaboration for self-preservation, is just the kind of balm we need to take the edge off right now.

SERIES REVIEW

'The Count of Monte Cristo' is a handsome and enjoyable adaptation

By MOIRA MACDONALD
The Seattle Times (TNS)

There's a reason why Alexandre Dumas' 1840s novel "The Count of Monte Cristo" has survived an uncanny number of adaptations (more than four dozen versions for film and television, in multiple languages), for good or ill: It's a pretty great story. At its heart, it's a tale of revenge: A young Marseilles sailor, Edmond Dantès, is seized by police (on the eve of his wedding, no less) and falsely accused of treason; he's thrown into a hellish prison and spends years there plotting a rather improbable escape. Upon finally emerging after 15 years, he seizes a hidden fortune, reinvents himself as the mysterious Count of Monte Cristo and gets busy wreaking elaborate revenge on those who have wronged him, as one would. (Well, I would.)

Paolo Modugno / MASTERPIECE and Mediawan / PBS / TNS

Sam Claflin as Edmond Dante¨s in "The Count of Monte Cristo."

The latest version, made for British television and now airing/streaming on PBS, is both handsomely rendered and enjoyably silly: the very definition of a guilty pleasure. Directed by Bille August (whose many credits include "The House of the Spirits" and "A Fortunate Man"), it's an eight-part series filmed in numerous gorgeous locations in France, Italy and Malta. Yes, that's the actual 16th-century island prison Château d'If making a haunting cameo appearance at the beginning of the series, as Edmond's fiancée, Mercédès, gazes sadly across the water at the prison, and then again at the end, in a very different context. It plays its part well.

Sam Claflin ("Daisy Jones & the Six," "Enola Holmes") stars as Edmond, a role that requires him to age nearly two decades, look handsome while moldering away in a prison, transform effectively into a velvet-coated gentleman and sell extremely dramatic and ominous dialogue such as "The vengeance I will deliver will equal the crime," and he's very much up to the job. Jeremy Irons makes a relatively brief appearance in the early episodes as the Abbé Faria, an elderly scholar and inmate-next-door who helps Edmond tunnel his way out of the prison, gives him etiquette lessons and tips him off to the hidden treasure before conveniently shuffling off this mortal coil. (Irons, somehow, makes all of this seem perfectly reasonable.) Ana Girardot is the heartbroken Mercédès; Harry Taurasi is her evil cousin Fernand, who wants Mercédès for himself and schemes with Danglars (Blake Ritson, of "The Gilded Age") to remove Edmond from the picture.

'The Count Of Monte Cristo'

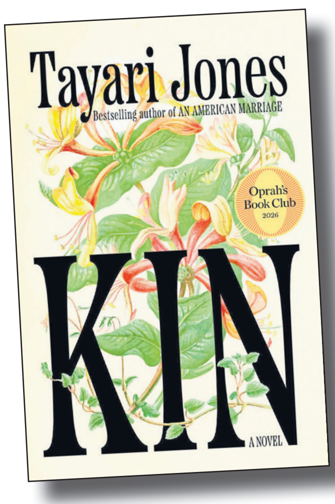
Rating: TV-14

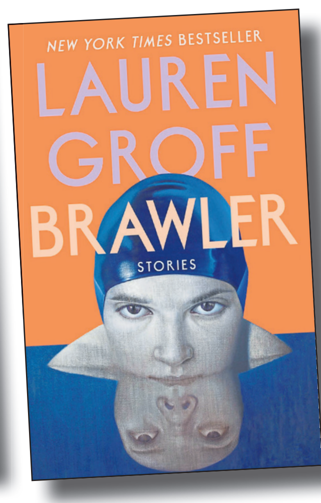
How to watch: 10 p.m. ET Sundays on PBS (and streaming on the PBS app and PBS Masterpiece on Prime Video)

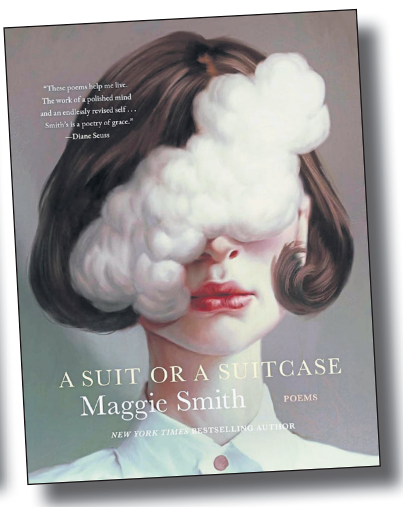
The fact that a lot about "The Count of Monte Cristo" makes no sense whatsoever – why does Mercédès, or for that matter any of the characters, not recognize Edmond immediately? Why are people always dying of grief? Was everyone in 18th-century France busy poisoning each other? – matters not at all; what's more important here are the absolutely stunning rooms in which all of this takes place, and the conviction with which the cast delivers their occasionally ill-written dialogue. (My favorite is Mercédès, in the ominous tones of someone pronouncing an execution: "Now is hardly the time to go to the opera, Albert.") The plot gets rather intricate, as adaptations of thousand-page classic novels tend to be, and you may at times lose track of exactly who is poisoning who, and wonder how this series can be simultaneously so complicated and yet so obvious. (Someone actually says in the first episode, gazing at the Château d'If, "No one gets out of there alive." Well, if that's true, we have a pretty long seven episodes coming up, don't we?)

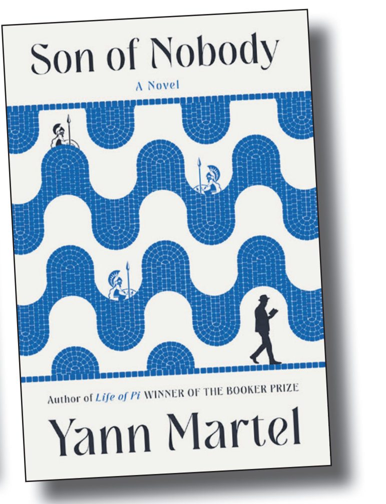
But this "Count of Monte Cristo" overall works wonderfully, with some delightful performances (Ritson is awfully good at snake-like nastiness) and just enough poignancy to justify its running time. Claflin and Girardot, though separated for much of the series, have genuine chemistry, and Mercédès' slow (too slow, but never mind) realization that this swashbuckling count is her beloved Edmond is genuinely moving. "Have you ever truly been in love?" she asks the count, gazing at him as if trying to piece a puzzle together. His pause before answering is as vast as the sea surrounding the Château d'If. "Once," he finally says.

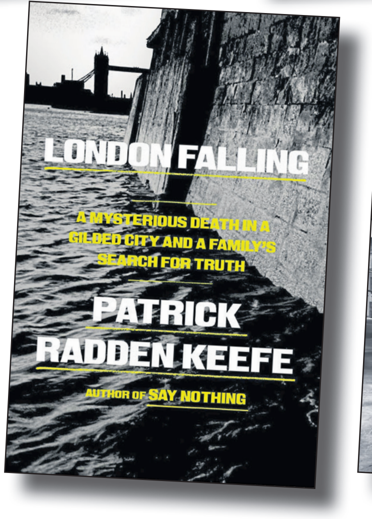
BOOKS



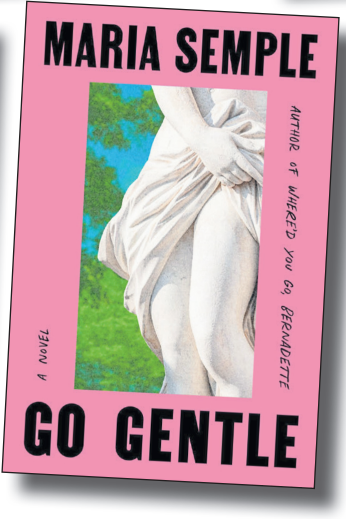


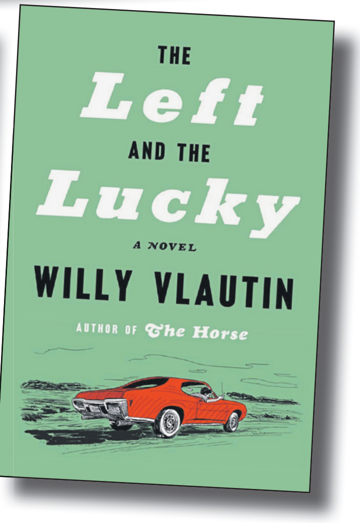





LONDON FALLING
A MYSTERIOUS DEATH IN A GILDED CITY AND A FAMILY'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH
PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE
AUTHOR OF SAY NOTHING

GWENDOLINE RILEY
THE PALM HOUSE





12 novels and nonfiction books to read, add to your TBR for spring

By ERIK PEDERSEN
The Orange County Register (TNS)

These are challenging times by any metric, but here's something that's also true: 2026 is shaping up to be a great year for books.

Some of our most talented writers are delivering novels, nonfiction and poetry in the coming months. If you want to lose yourself in a good book or just take a break from whatever it is you need a break from, rest easy knowing that there is a stellar lineup of titles coming to your local independent bookstore.

So, here are 12 books to put on your calendar and you can be assured of at least one thing: This represents just some of the titles I'm looking forward to reading and sharing with you as we approach spring. So let's get started.

'A World Appears'

Author: Michael Pollan

Pollan has taken readers on all kinds of trips throughout his career, and this may be one of his most adventurous. In this nonfiction investigation, he attempts to figure out what human consciousness is, even as we face challenges from A.I. and ponder the question of what it means to be a person.

PUBLICATION DATE: Out now

'Kin'

Author: Tayari Jones

In this follow-up to her super-successful bestseller, "An American Marriage," Jones returns with a novel about the divergent paths taken by two young women growing up without their mothers in the South. (The author will be talking to us about the book in an upcoming story.)

PUBLICATION DATE: Out now

'Brawler'

Author: Lauren Groff

Groff is so well known for her National Book Award-nominated novels "Fates & Furies" and "Matrix" that you could almost forget she is an exceptional short story writer. Her collection "Florida" was also a finalist for the National Book Award (that's three nominations!) and it won The Story Prize, so you can expect "Brawler" to hit hard. (We have an interview upcoming with her, too.)

PUBLICATION DATE: Out Now

'Python's Kiss'

Author: Louise Erdrich

In her new collection of short fiction, National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize winner Erdrich composes stories that deliver rich experiences in a variety of settings: a girl and her aunt discussing wedding dresses; a part-time school bus driver navigating a blizzard; an afterlife featuring unexpected holdovers from earth. Expect these pieces to delight, surprise and transport you. (And we'll be speaking with her about this book, too.)

PUBLICATION DATE: Out now

'A Suit or a Suitcase'

Author: Maggie Smith

Known for her devastating poem, "Good Bones," Smith has found success with her memoir, "You Could Make This Place Beautiful," and nonfiction works on creativity and inspiration, "Dear Writer" and "Keep Moving." This new book is a return to poetry, and its title piece alone has us excited to read more.

PUBLICATION DATE: Out now

'Son of Nobody'

Author: Yann Martel

In his first novel in a decade, the bestselling author of "Life of Pi" returns with a story about a scholar who finds a lost epic poem about the Trojan War, which has uncanny correlations to his own life as he works on translating it.

PUBLICATION DATE: March 31

'London Falling: A Mysterious Death in a Gilded City and a Family's Search for Truth'

Author: Patrick Radden Keefe

Author of one of the best works of nonfiction of the 21st Century, "Say Nothing," Keefe presents here what at first appears to be a work of true crime – the story of a young man who fell, jumped or was pushed from a high-rise apartment in London. But as the author investigates, a larger, more tangled story about money, crime, class and influence emerges.

PUBLICATION DATE: April 7

'Transcription'

Author: Ben Lerner

A poet and author of much-admired novels, including "The Topeka School" and "10:04," returns with a work of fiction about a writer who travels to interview his aging mentor – only he's without a recording device after dropping his phone in the hotel sink.

PUBLICATION DATE: April 7

'My Dear You'

Author: Rachel Khong

The author of the acclaimed "Real Americans" and "Goodbye, Vitamin," which won the California Book Award for First Fiction, returns with a collection of short fiction that explores love, dating, race, capitalism and many other things.

PUBLICATION DATE: April 7

'The Palm House'

Author: Gwendoline Riley

Riley is the author of the much-praised novels "My Phantoms" and "First Love," and this new one concerns the friendship between two Londoners, a writer and an editor, who meet up to discuss work, life and their parents.

PUBLICATION DATE: April 14

'Go Gentle'

Author: Maria Semple

The author of "Where'd You Go, Bernadette" returns with a new novel about a divorced Stoic philosopher named Adora Hazzard, whose well-ordered life and deeply considered existence get shaken up by a combination of sketchy art deals and her own shady past.

PUBLICATION DATE: April 14

'The Left and the Lucky'

Author: Willy Vlautin

I'm already on record as loving Vlautin's previous novel, "The Horse," and this new one sounds like a balm for difficult times. Divorced housepainter Eddie befriends Russell, his 8-year-old next-door neighbor; Russell's mother has her hands full taking care of her aging mother and Russell's troubled older brother. Everybody can use good friends – or a book about them, right?

PUBLICATION DATE: April 14

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, March 14, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. Judge Stone. Davis/Patterson. Little, Brown
2. The Wings That Bind (deluxe ed.). Briar Boleyn. Mira
3. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
4. Kin. Tayari Jones. Knopf
5. My Husband's Wife. Alice Feeney. Pine & Cedar
6. The Crossroads C.J. Box Putnam
7. Felicia's Favorites. Danielle Steel. Delacorte
8. Between Two Fires. Christopher Buehlman. Tor Nightfire
9. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
10. The Widow. John Grisham. Doubleday

Hardcover nonfiction

1. Nothing Is Impossible with God. Shannon Bream. Harper Influence
2. Getting Naked. Valerie Bertinelli. Harper Wave
3. Stripped Down. Bunnie Xo. Dey Street
4. Nobody's Girl. Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Knopf
5. You with the Sad Eyes. Christina Applegate. Little, Brown
6. The King Is Coming. John Bevere. Thomas Nelson
7. Apple. David Pogue. Simon & Schuster
8. A World Appears. Michael Pollan. Penguin Press
9. Eat to Hustle. Robin Arzón. Voracious
10. We the Women. Norah O'Donnell. Ballantine

Trade paperback

1. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
2. Mistakes Were Made. Lucy Score. Bloom
3. Want to Know a Secret? Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
4. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
5. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
6. Blood & Roses. Callie Hart. Grand Central
7. Just Friends. Haley Pham. Atria
8. Psycho Beasts. Jasmine Mas. Mira
9. Woman Down. Colleen Hoover. Montlake
10. Strange Buildings. Uketsu. HarperVia

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

'Eradication' author Jonathan Miles opened for the Rolling Stones

By ERIK PEDERSEN
The Orange County Register (TNS)

Jonathan Miles, author of the novels "Dear American Airlines" and "Want Not," has just published "Eradication: A Fable."

As well as fiction, Miles has published essays, journalism and other nonfiction in The New York Times and toured as a musician in Jon Batiste's band in 2024. Here, he takes the Book Pages Q&A.

Q: Please tell readers about your new book, "Eradication."

A: "Eradication: A Fable" is the story of a grief-broken man who tries to mend himself by taking what he thinks is a conservation assignment on an isolated, unpeopled Pacific island. The job involves killing, something he's never done before, and the act of it – the pain, the blood, the waste, the silence – causes a slew of questions to bubble up, about his own life and other lives, both human and animal. Soon enough, he discovers he's not the only person on the supposedly unpeopled island – and not the only killer, either.

Q: The book brings up the challenges of being responsible stewards of the world and addressing human-caused problems. Can you talk about why you decided to engage with this topic?

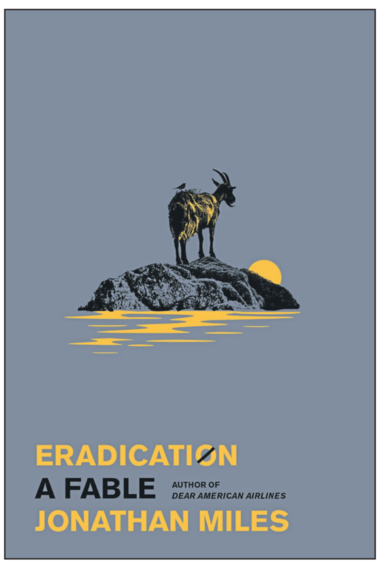
A: I began my writing career as an outdoors journalist, writing about fishing and hunting and climbing and river-running, so the natural world has always been close to the heart of what I think about, if not always what I've written fiction about. Questions about ecological stewardship and responsibility eventually boiled over in me, however. Writing novels is how I explore questions, though not always answer them.

Q: Did you need to spend a lot of time with goats to write this book?

A: I have two close friends who, in midlife, decided to raise goat herds, and their counsel was a crucial constant for me. I have no doubt they were often bewildered by my questions.

Q: Unlike most novelists, you've opened for the Rolling Stones as part of Jon Batiste's band. Can you share how you balance your music and your writing?

A: Jon helped me understand that they're manifestations of the same artistic impulse. What you're ultimately trying to do, whether on the stage or the page, is to move people: to make them think, reflect, remember, stir, wonder, and maybe dance, sure, but most of all feel. In both instances, you hope that the art you make nudges them, even slightly, in some new direction, toward a fresh intensity.



Doubleday / TNS

Q: Do you remember the first book that made an impact on you?

A: "Stone Fox," a children's book by John Reynolds Gardner. It's a tear-jerker about a boy and his sled dog, and I couldn't believe, at the age of nine, the emotions it wrung from me. That ink marks on a page had gutted me so thoroughly – ink marks that described imaginary people, to boot – felt like deep magic to me. One response to encountering magic, I suppose, is to try to see if you can conjure it yourself.

Q: Do you have a favorite book or books?

A: "Ship of Fools," by Katherine Anne Porter, a twentieth-century writer we don't hear about nearly often enough nowadays. Porter belongs to that rare order of writers whose severity enlarges the world rather than shrinking it. Her prose is exacting to the point of moral pressure. Clarity, in her hands, becomes a form of mercy.

Q: Is there a person who made an impact on your reading life – a teacher, a parent, a librarian or someone else?

A: My mother was a voracious reader. In fact, I first encountered Katherine Anne Porter on her bookshelves. What she modeled for me was that reading was pleasure – not duty, like eating vegetables, but pleasure, a way of stealing moments from the humdrum of life, of escaping our universe, if only for an hour or two a night, for the limitless frontiers of imagination.

Q: Do you listen to audiobooks? If so, are there any titles or narrators you'd recommend?

A: On rare occasions. I like the tactile nature of reading: scribbling in the margins, dog-earing pages, knowing where I fell asleep while reading because the book is face down on my chest. Recently, I listened to Gary Sinise narrating John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men." The problem for me there was that whenever George was scolding Lennie, I kept hearing Lieutenant Dan chewing out Forrest Gump.

Q: What are you reading now?

A: I just finished a remarkable nonfiction book called "The Feather Wars," out next month. It's a history of the mass slaughter of American birds in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – but more important, a history of the activists and forward-thinking politicians who put an end to that slaughter and saved a slew of bird species from extinction. It's a bracing reminder that ecological activism can work, because it has.

Q: How do you decide what to read next?

A: By grazing, maybe like a goat. I'm constantly receiving books, buying books, accruing books, and most get stacked on an old trunk in my living room. Most nights find me dipping into one, then dipping into another, and so forth, until something hooks me. Something always does.

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

Strapped into the insane, 700-horsepower Ford F-150 Super Lobo

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

The compact Ford Maverick Lobo street truck is a treat. Lowered chassis, Turbofan wheels, four-wheel-drift mode. All that's missing is a supercharged Coyote V-8 engine.

EEEEEEAHWWWRRGH! Say hello to big brother, Ford F-150 Lobo with Supercharger Kit.

The Dream Cruise is gonna freak over this beast. I exited Rapid Road in Pontiac onto Woodward in my Rapid Red Metallic-painted tester and nailed the throttle. Rapid Red, indeed. Like the bastard child of a coyote and Tasmanian Devil, the 700-horsepower, forced-induction, 5.0-liter V-8 shrieked like a banshee out of Hell. EEEEEEAHWWWRRGH!

Call it Super Lobo.

Just in time for this summer's cruisin', Ford offers the Supercharger Kit as a 300-horsepower (300 horsepower!) upgrade to the F-150 Lobo's standard, 400-horse Coyote V-8. I'm not making this up. In fact, you can get the Supercharger Kit on any V8-equipped F-150 or Mustang GT to make them sound like a banshee. The Super 'Stang will actually pump out 810 horses. I'm still not making this up.

More: Supercharge me: Ford kit boosts horsepower for F-150, Mustang V-8s

Unlike some other brands, Ford never shelved its V-8s, and – now that draconian U.S. emissions standards have been shelved – internal combustion engines are off the leash. The $60K Lobo is the appetizer to the F-150's performance truck lineup that includes the $67K Tremor dirt-kicker, $82K Raptor super-truck, and $113K Raptor R mega-truck.

But for those who want their 700-horsepower V-8 a la carte instead of the loaded, Fox-shocked, leather-wrapped $113,525 Raptor R Imperial Star Destroyer – there's the Lobo Supercharger Kit. Complete with factory-installed warranty.

Just order the $59,605 F-150 Lobo entrée.

Add a side of Whipple supercharger for $10,200.

Add $7,300 Supercharger installation fee.

Your $77,105 Super Lobo comin' right up ($85,330 if you supercharge the Tremor V-8).

Deeeetroit-licious.

Lobo is based on the F-150's affordable, non-work-truck, entry-level STX trim.

Two-inch lowered chassis, front-and-side body skirts to accentuate the low-rider look, horizontal light signature across the grille, black hood vents, 22-inch, low-profile black wheels wrapped in all-season tires. It's handsome, but doesn't scream street truck like li'l bro' Lobo.

You certainly wouldn't expect it to have 700 ponies under the hood.

No L-O-B-O badge stamped across the grille (a la the R-A-P-T-O-R). No giant hood scoop. No bulging fenders. It's not as low as street legends of yore like the Ford F-150 SVT Lightning or Dodge Ram SRT-10.

Hoist yourself inside the F-150 Lobo (even with lowered chassis, wee Mrs. Payne still needed a ladder) and the STX grade is more apparent. What? No push-button start?

Manual cloth seats, no individual climate controls, no heated steering wheel, no wireless charging pad for my phone.

I inserted the old-school key in the ignition and the V-8 roared to life, the supercharger whining like, well, a coyote that hadn't been fed in a week.

True to Ford's tech-forward vision, twin digital 12-inch instrument and infotainment screens guided my way. The system quickly synced with my Android phone, including the Android Auto app that houses my Sirius XM account and Google Maps app.

"Hey, Google," I barked. "Navigate to Sunrise BP Station, Richmond, Michigan." (Sunrise stations pop my favorite popcorn for movie nights.)

Done.

"Hey, Google. Tune to Sirius XM NASCAR Channel."

Done.

I cruised up I-75, merged onto M-59 East, and released the Kraken. EEEEEEAHWWWRRGH!

Like a four-wheel killer whale, I ingested slower traffic like herring, hitting (number withheld to save my license) mph. Appetite slaked, Super Lobo settled into a 75 mph lope in cruise control. It's a sleeper truck like the single cab F-150 700 that Ford sold with the same supercharged mill from 2021 to 2023.

Like the 700, it's the 22s wrapped in all-season tires that are the giveaway.

Upscale Tremor and Raptors come standard armed with all-terrain tires for going deep off-road. The Lobo wants to stay on-road so you can blast that V-8 whenever the adrenaline rises – whether equipped with 400 horses or 700.

I made my way across 32 Mile in rural Macomb County. This is pickup country, with a diversity of wildlife spanning everything from work trucks to Raptors to Cybertrucks. Lobo would fit in nicely for business owners at a work site: not too showy to put off crews, but with enough swagger to raise eyebrows from fellow motorheads. As Home Improvement comedian Tim Allen would say: UGH UGH UGH!

What's with the 22-inch wheels?

It's the Lobo street truck.

Cool. What's under the hood?

700 horsepower. UGH UGH UGH!

Interesting that Ford did not choose – as on the smaller, twin-clutch-pack-equipped Maverick Lobo – to inject the big truck with a LOBO mode for easier drifting. No doubt Ford wanted to keep costs down so that Lobo wouldn't push into Tremor price territory.

But Ford has also gone beyond the ol' F-150 700 package to make sure Lobo is not just a Dream Cruise show horse, but an all-weather workhorse.

While F-150 700 was available for a variety of cabs as well as 4WD and RWD, Lobo comes in a singular, popular configuration: SuperCrew cab with 5.5-foot bed.

The pickup also comes standard with a sophisticated, four-wheel-drive transfer case featuring 4WD LOW, 4WD AUTO, or 2WD drive. Want to go 4-wheel drifting? Buy the more nimble Maverick Lobo.

F-150 Lobo brings full-size truck utility – its cabin and bed littered with 120-volt plugs, USB/USB-C ports, storage cubbies, and a ladder frame chassis rated at 7,900-pound towing that will pull your horse trailer to the farm.

On muddy, heavily-rutted 31 Mile, the Bridgestone Alenza all-seasons did nicely, though I was more careful with their low-profile sidewalls (not to mention those precious rims) than I would have been in high-profile all-terrains on sister performance trucks.

Typical of full-size pickups, you could comfortably seat the Detroit Pistons front line in the back seat. Or flip the seats up and throw a couple of bicycles back there. Or luggage, or your dog.

When Ford offered the electric Lightning truck, I enjoyed opening the front trunk to reveal – nothing. The frunk was a great place to sit and watch Dream Cruisers pass by. Screw a Whipple Supercharger on the Lobo and lifting the hood will serve a more traditional purpose.

Dude, is that a supercharger?!

Pull up to a Chevy at a Woodward stoplight, however, and they'll never guess what's under the hood. Until you punch the throttle and Super Lobo soars.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

2026 Ford F-150 Lobo with Supercharger Kit

★★★★

Vehicle type: Front-engine, four-wheel drive, five-passenger pickup

Price: $77,105, including $2,795 destination charge (Lobo standard, $59,605)

Powerplant: 5.0-liter, supercharged V-8

Power: 700 horsepower, 590 pound-feet of torque

Transmission: 10-speed automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph, sub-5.0 seconds (mfr.); towing, 7,900 pounds.

Weight: N/A

Fuel economy: EPA: 15 mpg observed

Report card

Highs: Ferocious power; affordable supertruck

Lows: Turn-key ignition; will drink a fuel pump dry

2026 Chevrolet Equinox makes EVs seem shockingly normal

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

At their best, Chevrolets have always been designed for Middle America, where the high school gym is a coliseum, the marching band is a Roman legion, and Friday night lights are worshipped with the fervor of a televangelist after three cans of Mountain Dew. These cars don't try to impress, because impressing costs money, and Middle America has better things to spend money on, like Taco Bell, Netflix and semi-legal fireworks. Instead, Chevys offer the subtle thrill of the meatloaf dinner that you didn't order but you eat anyway, because it's meatloaf and somehow comforting.

Enter the 2026 Chevrolet Equinox EV: a midsize, battery-electric, two-row SUV that has a very difficult job: please the plebs, carry the spawn, and look modern and urbane while doing it. Flash? That's the Chevrolet Corvette's milieu.

Looking far better than its gas-burning cousin, the handsome Equinox EV's side view is particularly sporty, with an aggressive stance. It appears smaller than you might expect, but don't let that fool you. There's 26 cubic feet of cargo space, 57 cubic feet with the second row folded. That's enough to fit your luggage, a folding kayak and your aspirations. Try to fit a chair and suddenly the sleek roofline laughs in your face like a judgmental school principal. Still, big friends fit without hydraulic assistance, which counts for something.

Inside, Chevrolet fits the Equinox EV with a 17.7-inch display, a touchscreen large enough to double as a battlefield map. It's bright, crisp and mostly logical once you navigate the sub-menu digital hell constructed by someone who enjoys cruelty disguised as interface design. Want the trip computer? Three screen taps. Why it isn't in the instrument cluster? Future archaeologists will ponder this right next to the unsolved mystery of how frozen pizza is legal.

The seating position is comfortably high. Unfortunately, the seats are about as supportive as a libertarian at a union meeting, being flat, firm and utterly lacking in side bolstering. The materials are pure modern Chevrolet: acceptable, durable and clearly selected by someone who had to hit a spreadsheet target. Nothing feels flimsy, and the overall effect is clean and modern without being sterile. It's a cabin designed for use, although it lacks the unexpected panache you might find in some of its more design-forward electric competitors.

Horsepower, range and charging performance prove competitive. Front-wheel-drive single-motor models generate 220 horsepower, 243 pound-feet of torque and provide 319 miles of range. My all-wheel-drive dual-motor Equinox EV produced 300 horsepower, 355 pound-feet of torque and provided 309 miles of range. And unlike some EVs, the estimates prove accurate rather than wildly optimistic. Recharging with a public DC Fast Charger provides 77 miles of range in 10 minutes, while charging at home with 240 volts delivers 36 miles of range per hour.

Driving the Equinox EV delivers the kind of competence that you'd expect of a midsize family SUV. Acceleration is brisk enough in that smooth, electric way that makes gas engines feel like rotary phones. You don't get thrown back in your seat, but it never feels underpowered. The powertrain just does its thing, quietly and competently. Steering is nicely weighted and accurate, while the front MacPherson strut/rear multi-link suspension ably absorbs broken pavement, expansion joints and frost-heaved roads with a reassuring sense of indifference. The Equinox EV doesn't incite, it relaxes. For a vehicle likely to spend most of its life commuting, carpooling and running errands, that's exactly the right attitude. And with no gas engine to drone on, the cabin becomes a mobile monastery of calm, perfect for listening to music, podcasts or the unruly void of your own thoughts, whichever is louder.

Alas, price reminds you that nothing good comes free. While it starts at $44,200, my tester cost $56,740. That's Cadillac Optiq territory, the automotive equivalent of a family man showing up at a black-tie gala wearing sensible shoes.

Nevertheless, the 2026 Chevrolet Equinox EV really shines in that it doesn't try to be a rolling manifesto. It doesn't lecture you. It doesn't beg for admiration. It just shows up every day, ready to haul people, groceries and sports equipment. It proves how normal electric vehicles can be. That may not sound exciting, but Middle America values durability, usability and a certain quiet confidence that comes from not needing to show off. The 2026 Chevrolet Equinox EV makes the electric future feel less like a avant-garde bold leap and more like a natural next step. And for a brand that's spent more than a century building transportation for real people in real places, that's impressive.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

2026 Chevrolet Equinox EV

Base price: $44,200 (As tested: $56,740)

Powertrain: Dual-motor all-wheel drive

Horsepower/Torque: 300/355 pound-feet

EPA-Rated Range: 307 miles

Recharge time, Level 2: 36 miles per hour

Length/Width/Height: 191/77/65 inches

Ground clearance: 6.4 inches

Payload: 1,100 pounds

Cargo capacity: 26-57 cubic feet

Towing capacity: 1,500 pounds

Jim Fets / Chevrolet / TNS

TECHNOLOGY

TECH REVIEW

Logitech wants to help you ‘master’ your desktop setup

ABOVE: Logitech’s MX Brio 4K Ultra HD webcam.

LEFT: Logitech’s MX Master 4 mouse.

Photos by Logitech / TNS

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

If you spend your workdays at a computer, you start to notice things.

You’ll notice if your monitor is flickering, or if the text is too big or too small to read comfortably.

You’ll also being to notice if your chair is comfortable and work to adjust it, so your back and arms don’t get tired.

The next thing you’ll notice is how your keyboard and mouse feel in your hands.

When I was in college, I’m not sure I ever thought I’d spend my days at a desk. I was going to be a photojournalist (and I was for a decade), but now I work with a keyboard and mouse instead of a digital camera.

For the last month, I’ve been using a few things from the Logitech MX Master Series of computer accessories, including the MX Keys S keyboard, MX Master 4 mouse and MX Brio web cam.

If you spend your days working on a computer, these are among the best investments you can make to upgrade your computer setup.

These are all available from Logitech.com.

MX Keys S ($129.99)

This is Logitech’s flagship keyboard with a low profile and laptop-style scissor switches under the keys. They keys themselves have small dish-shaped indentations that keep your fingertips centered and really increase typing accuracy (at least for me).

The MX Keys S is solid and doesn’t move around at all on your desk. The typing angle is fixed, you can’t adjust the keyboard angle on your desk, but it sits perfectly for my hands to type comfortably.

It connects to your computer(s) via Bluetooth or an included USB-A receiver. It uses USB-C to charge its internal battery. You can pair the keyboard with up to three devices and there are buttons to quickly switch between them.

The MX Keys S works cross-platform for Mac or Windows, but there is a Mac-specific version as well.

The keys have smart backlighting that illuminates when your fingers move toward the keys. The lighting shuts itself off after about 30 seconds of inactivity.

The top row of keys have icons to allow quick access to features like screen or keyboard brightness, enabling dictation, bringing up an emoji picker, muting/unmuting your microphone and keys for media playback and volume level.

Logi Options+ is software for the keyboard to enable deep customization of every function key for individual apps. You can have different customizations for all your favorite apps. You can also set up smart actions to launch apps, open files, and input custom keyboard commands.

I plan on spending the next few weeks trying to learn all the ways the MX Keys S can help me work better.

MX Master 4 ($119.99)

I’ve always used pretty basic mice.

The Logitech MX Master 4 is anything but basic. Just looking at it, you can tell there’s a lot going on.

The mouse has a very distinctive shape that’s ergonomic, but not overly so. There is a tall thumb rest with a surface to rest your palm. It features aluminum scroll wheels for both the horizontal and vertical directions. Don’t scoff at a horizontal scroll wheel, especially if you use large spreadsheets every day.

The MX Master 4 is improved from the previous model by changing some of the surfaces from soft-touch rubber to a harder, textured plastic that stays cleaner after being touched by your fingers all day.

Just under the horizontal scroll wheel, there are three control buttons for your thumb and below those sits a large haptic button that can give you vibrating feedback that’s customizable. The vertical scroll wheel is free-spinning, which means you can flick it with your finger and it’ll spin like a slot machine reel for a really long time, which makes scrolling through very long documents much faster and easier on your hands.

The MX Master 4 can connect via Bluetooth or an included USB-C receiver. Its internal battery charges via USB-C.

The Logi Options+ app is also in use here. You can use it to customize every bit of the MX Master 4 experience. There is a very handy feature called the Action Ring, that is a circle of customizable shortcut icons that is called up by pressing your thumb on the haptic button. If you take some time and learn how to set up the action ring for your frequently used features, it can be a real time saver.

MX Brio 4K Ultra HD webcam ($199.99)

You know how you see some people in your meetings who look crystal clear, while the rest of us look like we are being filmed through a dirty window? Those people have replaced their standard webcam with a 4K webcam like the Logitech MX Brio.

The MX Brio has a resolution of 4K/30fps (3,840x2,160 pixels), with advanced autofocus and a glass lens and an 8.5-megapixel Sony STARVIS sensor.

The camera itself is wonderful, but when you pair it with the Logi Options+ app, you can turn on auto framing, which will keep your centered in the field of view if you move around.

You really have complete control over crop, exposure, image enhancement and focus – all through the app.

And if you’re paranoid about privacy, there is a physical shutter you can close by rotating a ring around the lens.

This is a sweet camera that will make you the best looking person in your weekly Zoom meeting.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

BELOW: Logitech’s MX Keys S keyboard.

Sometimes technology is annoying

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

I had an email exchange with a reader yesterday.

He wrote, “I recently bought a pair of Dayton speakers for my desktop. They connect via Bluetooth, which is fine, but every time Bluetooth connects/disconnects from the speakers, it makes a LOUD ding-dong alert sound, which I find rather annoying. I can’t find anything online about adjusting or even eliminating this sound. Any ideas?”

I asked him if he thought the sound was coming from the computer, or if it was the speakers. I asked him to disconnect the speakers from the computer and pair them to his cell phone and see if they still made the same connection chime.

The reader stated it was the speakers making the sound.

I looked on Dayton’s website and didn’t find a mention of disabling or lowering the volume of the connection chime.

I’ve also experienced a tone or chime when I connect to various Bluetooth speakers from my computer or my phone.

The manual for the specific speakers states the user should expect to hear the chime when the speakers connect.

The speakers have a built-in amplifier and volume buttons on top of the speakers, so my only advice was to keep the volume low on the speaker and see if that lowered the chime volume.

But that’s a lot to ask to remember to turn down the volume every time you turn off the computer.

This is a nuisance, and I’m sure it’s why this reader is asking in the first place, but I’m afraid this time I was not much help.

These better be some pretty good speakers, or perhaps the placement requires a wireless connection. If they’re not your dream speakers, I’d give some serious consideration to replacing them with something with a wired connection.

But we all have our levels of annoyance we are willing to endure.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

GADGETS

Vacuum packs powerful dirt-detecting tech

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Being the owners of two dogs who shed, we wage a daily battle against the fur. We keep up with it, but having a vacuum like the new **Ultenic U15** smart cordless to test instantly made life easier.

The Ultenic U15 is lightweight, doesn’t take up much closet space, and is easy to move around. It stands upright; often this style is referred to as a stick vacuum. The stand-alone style makes it easy to store, grab and put back to charge.

The high-tech features include GreenEye dirt-detection technology, adaptive suction, and a 6-stage filtration system. The suction is rated at 50 kPa, perfect for removing dog hair from everywhere: flat surfaces, carpets and furniture.

The GreenEye dirt-detection technology is amazing, as it illuminates dust that you wouldn’t see without the technology. Ultenic says the technology uses precision sensors and lighting to detect hidden dust and automatically boost suction where needed. Vacuum without it and then with it, and you’ll see how the GreenEye sees the invisible.

The adjustable telescopic pole extends from 33.4 inches to 38.1 inches, and up to 44.8 inches. You can take the pole off, and it turns into a hand-held vacuum. Put on some of the included accessories, such as the motorized tool brush or the upholstery tool, both ideal for cleaning furniture cushions. Several other attachments are included to reach and clean different areas.

Its 6-stage filtration system is said to capture up to 99.97 percent of microscopic particles, including dirt, dust, hair, pollen and allergens. Everything is captured in an easy-to-empty 1.2L dustbin, without having to touch the collected dust.

The 180-degree swivel head, with onboard LED lights, makes it simple to reach anywhere: corners, under tables or sofas, etc. Having hair get tangled in the roller brush is not a thing with the U15; its tangle-free roller brush resists hair wrapping, as I can attest from my dogs and my wife’s long hair.

There are three modes: carpet, floor and turbo, which uses the maximum power. The black-and-gold U15 charges with the included AC adapter and runs for up to 65 minutes. A wall mount is included. Ultenic rates the noise level at 70 dB. Replacement batteries, HEPA filters (2 are included with the U15) and other accessories are available for purchase separately.

https://uk.ultenic.com/products/ultenic-u15-cordless-vacuum-cleaner, $139.99 at Amazon

Ultenic U15 smart cordless vacuum. (Ultenic / TNS)

Waterdrop, a company dedicated to improving household water quality, has recently introduced the **Waterdrop Filter X Series X12 Reverse Osmosis Syste**m. The premium tankless, space-saving under-sink water filtration system is engineered to deliver exceptionally pure, mineral-rich water with high-speed performance and improved water efficiency.

The Waterdrop Filter X12 measures 18.2 by 6.25 by 16.72 inches and features a 30-minute do-it-yourself installation for a tankless system that delivers up to 1200 gallons of purified drinking water per day. It has an advanced 11-stage filtration process, featuring a 0.0001 μm reverse osmosis membrane constructed from 16 precision layers, integrated UV sterilization and LED safety monitoring.

The X12 is AC-powered and features a user-friendly interface on the intelligent smart digital faucet for precise quantitative water output, with real-time displays of total dissolved solids, levels and filter life status.

Waterdrop states the system achieves an industry-leading 3:1 pure-to-drain ratio, significantly improving water efficiency compared with conventional reverse osmosis systems.

Company testing showed the system is proven to significantly reduce a wide range of contaminants. They added that the X12 also addresses a common limitation of traditional reverse osmosis systems by reintroducing beneficial minerals through innovative alkaline mineral boost technology and PCC rock activation technology.

Waterdrop / TNS

Waterdrop Filter X Series X12.

By supplementing calcium and magnesium and adjusting water pH to an optimal 7.5±, the system produces balanced, mineral-rich alkaline water that supports hydration, enhances taste, and contributes to overall wellness. A slight increase in TDS may occur naturally due to mineralization.

https://www.waterdropfilter.com/collections/undersink-ro-systems/waterdrop-x-series, $1,039

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

Paxton Media Group

E-edition EXTRA

HOME&GARDEN

BACKGROUND: Two matching twin beds are placed with identical artwork above as well as matching desks with identical mirrors and chairs. **BELOW:** Two beds are dressed with fun, bright "candy colors" to help create a festive feel.

Handout photos / TNS

DESIGN RECIPES

Seeing double

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Designing a shared bedroom can be both a challenge and an opportunity. A popular choice and need for families, shared rooms can poise different challenges especially as it relates to configuration and furniture placement.

Twin beds are often the go-to choice for flexibility, but those with larger rooms, may opt for full beds, which still provide flexibility, spaciousness and symmetry. To create a thoughtful, cohesive look, proper furniture placement can transform a complex or confined space into one that is balanced and elevated.

Here are five top design tips for maximizing and elevating a shared space.

- Consider placing a desk between two identical beds. A desk centered between two beds can help create a focal point.
- Match it. Identical design elements such as furniture, artwork, mirrors, bedding, and pillows and throws can help create a cohesive and appealing look.
- In a narrow room, place beds on opposite walls. Positioning beds across from one another helps create open floor space.
- Use an oversized rug to visually connect both beds in a furniture layout. Rugs that are too small will make a room feel "shrunken" and small, while larger rugs will help a room feel more unified, open and spacious.
- Utilize vertical elements. From architectural elements such as molding or wall paneling to wallpaper and even decorative paint, vertical elements can help make a ceiling feel taller and a space feel more generous.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

A long children's bedroom is maximized by the placement of twin beds opposite each other.

Scott Gabriel Morris / handout / TNS

A desk with shelf is used as a room divider, and shared space in this children's bedroom.

A neutral dresser is placed between two twin beds in a children's bedroom.

How can I make the most of spring gardening?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Spring is the perfect time to reset your outdoor space and give your garden some much-needed attention. A little planning and preparation now can result in beautiful blooms for the rest of the year.

I recommend starting by assessing the current state of your garden and tidying up where possible. If you covered your plants in the winter months, uncover them and inspect them for damage. Remove old plants, mulch and any weeds that have already popped up. This is also a good time to test the pH of your soil, so you can make adjustments if necessary.

Once your garden is cleaned up and you know what you're working with, you can start to plan your spring gardening projects. Luckily, spring is the ideal time to plant most plants, so you have an endless number of choices. If you haven't already, I recommend looking up your USDA hardiness zone. Knowing your hardiness zone will help you choose plants that will work best in your area. You should also determine how much sun your garden receives, so you can pick plants that will thrive in your space.

Try to plant large plants like trees, bushes, and shrubs first, and then move on to smaller plants like flowers. Once you've added all your plants, add some mulch to your garden to prevent weeds and keep your garden as healthy as possible. Make sure you grade the mulch away from your house to direct rainwater away from your home and promote proper drainage. Water is your home's worst enemy, so now is also a good time to clean your gutters and ensure your downspouts are clear and ready to direct rainwater away from your home and garden. If you aren't able (or just don't have the time) to refresh your garden yourself, bring in a landscaping pro to do it for you.

To make the most of your efforts, you should keep a close eye on your garden for the next few months to make sure everything is healthy and growing properly. Keep your plants well-hydrated (but don't drown them!) and keep the area surrounding the new plants weed-free. If you want to take it a step further, you can also add other features to your garden, like path lights or a birdbath. This will elevate the space and put the finishing touches on your new-and-improved garden.

If you don't already have a garden, spring is the perfect time to create one. Find an area in your yard that gets a lot of sun and map out the space to determine where to put your garden. I recommend hiring a pro to remove the grass and get your soil ready for plants. Once the prep work is done, you can move on to the fun part – designing your brand-new garden and choosing your first plants.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

Dreamstime / TNS

Make the most out of your spring gardening by coming up with a fool-proof gardening plan.

TRAVEL

Jack the Clown and his evil sidekick Chance at Universal Horror Unleashed in Las Vegas.
Universal Destinations & Experiences / TNS

Immerse yourself in Vegas

High-tech attractions take a trip to the next level

By JIM HARRINGTON
Bay Area News Group (TNS)

Las Vegas is – by very definition and mission statement – an immersive experience.

It wants all of you – your eyes, your ears, your stomach, your imagination and, of course, your wallet. It offers up giant resorts with so many amenities and attractions that, really once immersed inside one of these complexes, you never really need to leave for the entire length of your stay.

It's the type of place that comes at you basically the very moment you enter the city limits. And then it just keeps right on coming – with concerts, roulette tables, celebrity chefs, showgirls, spa treatments and so much more.

Still, Vegas is never content to stay stuck in its old ways. Instead, it's gone from Rat Pack to high-tech as its embraces cutting-edge technologies, from virtual reality attractions to a giant 360-degree screen, that submerge you into an alternative world. You'll basically find these newfangled immersive experiences around every corner, from The Strip to the revitalized downtown area and beyond.

Here are some of the very best of the bunch, all of which would take a Vegas itinerary to the next level.

AREA 15

Since opening in 2020, Area 15 has drawn well over 10 million visitors to its location just one mile off The Strip – and it's easy to figure out why.

Area 15 is a mixed-use experiential playground, offering up an impressive assortment of retail, dining, nightlife and immersive activities. One visit to this 40-acre complex is simply not enough – at least not if you want to take in all the diversely appealing attractions found in both the original Zone 1 and the more recently opened Zone 2.

But if you're only going to do one, definitely make sure it's the Interstellar Arc, which may well be the finest virtual reality attraction on the planet.

Interstellar Arc

The newly opened Interstellar Arc – located in Zone 2 – presents an approximately hourlong virtual reality experience that puts you right in middle of a Hollywood-style sci-fi epic.

The plot goes something like this: You're a futuristic space traveler, just waking up from a 200-year hypersleep-style nap, and you're on a mission to help colonize a new world – one that is located some 11.4 light years from Earth. That means it's time to explore your massive ship – the Interstellar Arc – and get a good look at this new world from above.

To be honest, I've never much cared for the basic VR-enhanced rides and such – in large part because they can leave me feeling a bit nauseated. So I was initially worried that spending 50-60 minutes with a VR headset on at the Arc would be rough sledding.

Yet, the experience turned out to be an absolute breeze – and delight – as I got to take in what is billed as the world's largest free-roaming VR experience. You take VR space shuttles, walk across VR glass floors, peer over VR ledges to see VR spacescapes, etc., as you casually make your way along an easy, flat guided path in this 20,000-square-foot space.

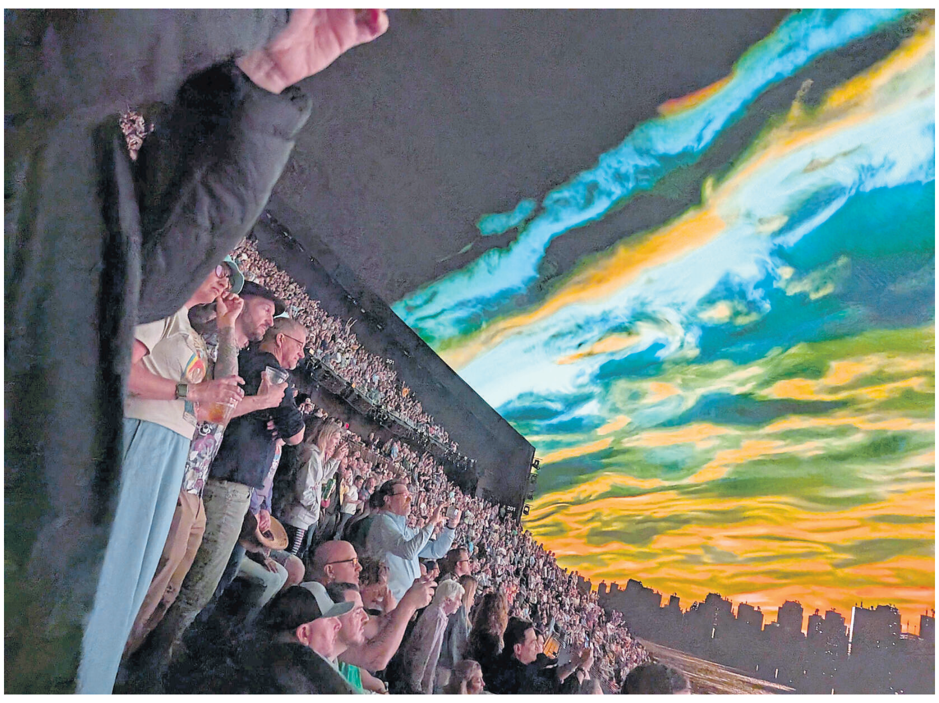
This is a true can't-miss Vegas experience.

DETAILS: Tickets start at $54. For more information, visit interstellararc.com.

Universal Horror Unleashed

Another new Zone 2 attraction is Universal Horror Unleashed, which nothing short of a dream – or, perhaps, nightmare – come true for those who think Halloween fun should last all year long.

As the name underscores, this chilling immersive experience comes courtesy of the same folks behind the popular Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Studios in Los Angeles, Orlando, Fla., Singapore and Osaka, Japan.



Jim Harrington / Bay Area news Group / TNS

Dead & Company perform on March 22, 2025, at the Sphere in Las Vegas.

Like the Halloween-season phenomenon, Universal Horror Unleashed also has multiple themed haunted houses filled with very convincing ghouls, axe murders and others menaces who all share the goal of making you shriek in terror.

Its four attractions are Universal Monsters (Frankenstein, the Mummy, etc.), Scarecrow: The Reaping (maybe the scariest of the bunch), The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Blumhouse's The Exorcist: Believer.

These experiences are at least as frightening as what you'll find at Halloween Horror Nights. Plus, you can get your scare on 12 months a year here.

DETAILS: Tickets start at $59. For more information, visit universalhorrorunleashed.com.

John Wick Experience

Leaving Zone 2 behind, let's venture back to Zone 1 to take in yet another great immersive attraction – one that will surely please fans of the best action film franchise of the 21st century.

Of course, we're talking about the John Wick movies starring Keanu Reeves.

In Area 15, you can experience what it's like to be an assassin on the run by venturing into the John Wick Experience. It's part escape room, part cinematic experience and part theatrical play, as you interact with actors – who refuse to break character – and make your way through rooms of the famed Continental Hotel from the Wick film franchise.

Oh, and did I mention that there's a $1.5 million contract on your head? Yeah, that turns up the urgency level – which the attraction designers have successfully built into the whole experience.

Highly recommended for Wick-heads and just anyone who likes a good Hollywood-style adrenaline rush.

DETAILS: Tickets start at $63.98. For more information, visit johnwickexperience.com.

Those are just three distinct highlights of the many Area 15 attractions. To explore more offerings, visit area15.com.

IMMERSIVE DINING

Lip Smacking Foodie Tours

There are plenty of ways to turn a mere meal into a full-on experience – especially in Vegas. Yet, very few mix the informative with the tasty better than the Lip Smacking Foodie Tours.

These culinary walking tours, which mostly run around 2 $^{1}/_{2}$ hours, are an amazing way to immerse yourself into the storied, ever-changing and diverse food scene in Las Vegas. They run several times per day, seven days per week, and cover all sorts of aspects of the culinary landscape.

You get to taste great food – a lot of great food – at fabulous restaurants and learn plenty of backstories and interesting tidbits from your guides.

Plus, it's a group activity, and even if you're flying solo, as I was on my recent Lip Smacking Foodie Tour, your fellow culinary travelers tend to be quite chummy and festive – especially if cocktails are part of the mix.

Given that most vacationers tend to stay on The Strip, it makes a lot of sense to sign up for a tour that is centered at one of the major hotel casinos.

Try the MGM Grand Lip Smacking Tour, which takes you through three of the resort's hottest restaurants – "Iron Chef" Masaharu Morimoto's self-named establishment, James Beard Award-winning chef Tom Colicchio's Craftsteak and popular Italian-American restaurant Luchini – where you get to sample some three-to-four dishes at each stop.

There's also a similar casino-centered tour of Mandalay Bay, offering up three stops – two of which (StripSteak and the Mediterranean/Middle Eastern restaurant Orla) happen to be Michael Mina establishments.

Both of those tours are great for people who want to minimize walking and avoid the elements – especially that blistering Vegas heat during the summer – because all the restaurants on each tour are housed in the same climate-controlled building.

The cost is $199 per person for a MGM tour and $175 for a Mandalay adventure. There are also beverage add-on packages for an additional fee (usually around $50-$70).

Big-time foodies – perhaps ones whose tech companies went public and turned them into multimillionaires – might want to check out the Ultimate Steakhouse Tour. It'll set you back – and this is not a misprint – $999 per person, but it might just be worth it if you're connoisseur of the finest beef in the land. It hits a number of different restaurants, at different resorts, including Bazaar Meat at The Palazzo – which celebrity chef Andrew Zimmern once dubbed the "best meat house in America."

For those (like me) who like to get off The Strip, I highly recommend the Downtown Lip Smacking Tour. It takes place near (but, thankfully, not on) the wild and crazy Fremont Street Experience, bringing you to four different stops – three restaurants and one bar – to sample a mix of cuisine ranging from modern American comfort food to inspired Mexican dishes. Plus, your guide will tell you all sorts of fascinating tales about this thriving business and cultural area – which, if your experience was anything like mine, could change how you perceive the city of Las Vegas.

The cost is $135 per person.

Also, back home, Lip Smacking now offers a foodie tour in San Jose – at Santana Row – which stops at four of the center's top restaurants.

DETAILS: For more information, or to book any of these tours, visit lipsmackingfoodietours.com.

Resorts World Las Vegas

Beyond the Lip Smacking, I'll toss in that one of my favorite spots to eat on The Strip is at Resort World Las Vegas (rwlasvegas.com). It offers some great quick bites – the best of which is the New York-style slices at Beverly Hills' famed Mulberry Street Pizzeria – as well as plenty of opportunities to satisfy your sweet tooth. As far as the latter goes, it could be almost too much of a good thing to have Randy's Donuts right across from those legendary cheesecakes of Junior's. Taking it up several notches is Kusa Nori, an incredible Japanese spot that may well rank as my top restaurant pick in Las Vegas.

THE SPHERE

The hottest and most celebrated immersive attraction in Las Vegas is, no doubt, the Sphere.

Since opening in late 2023, the Sphere has become the must-see concert venue – not just in Vegas but, really, in the entire world.

Go there once, and you'll understand why.

The exterior is amazing enough all of on its own – a mammoth geodesic dome standing 366 tall and projecting bright images that can be seen from miles away (as well as from the sky while you're flying in and out of Vegas).

And it gets even more impressive once you enter and take your seat, allowing the giant wraparound 16K-resolution screen – running from floor to ceiling – to take you on a musical trip you won't soon forget.

U2 opened the venue, with Dead & Company, Phish, the Eagles, Kenny Chesney and other titans of the industry following.

The calendar currently includes more Eagles shows through March, the return of the mighty Phish in April and May, No Doubt making its Sphere debut in May and June, and Carin Leon stopping by in September, among others. And metal fans from around the globe will be heading to Vegas to catch that highly anticipated Metallica Sphere residency, which kicks off in October.

Of course, concerts are pricey, and the artist you most want to see may not be playing at The Sphere when you're planning to be in Vegas.

Those are two of the (many) reasons why I recommend catching the ongoing run of 1939's "The Wizard of Oz," which screens at The Sphere several times a day, seven days a week.

Without giving away any of the surprises, I'll just say that "Oz" is a great way to experience the Sphere – one that takes advantage of the venue's 4D capabilities in ways that even the concerts don't. The film's tornado scene, in particular, is absolutely stunning.

This is no ordinary movie ticket – with ducats starting at around $114 – but it's well worth the price. Screenings are currently scheduled through the end of 2026.

DETAILS: For more information, visit thesphere.com.

WHERE TO STAY

There's never any shortage of appealing places to stay in Las Vegas. But since you're asking, I highly recommend the Hilton properties at Resorts World Las Vegas (rwlasvegas.com). The hotels are pretty posh, with a nice big pool area, a popular spa and nightclub (Zouk), a well-equipped gym and a nice selection of eateries.

Also, I'm a fan of the Flamingo Las Vegas – and not just because it has a Gordon Ramsay Burger location. The pluses are many, including a lively casino, great location on The Strip and, often, some really reasonable rates (caesars.com).